

**AN INTRODUCTION
TO INTERNET LINGUISTICS:
THE CULTURAL SOCIOLINGUISTIC TAKE WITH CASE STUDIES**

**Edited By
Diana Cotrău, Alexandra Cotoc, Oana Papuc**

Presa Universitară Clujeană

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DIANA COTRĂU | ALEXANDRA COTOC
OANA PAPUC**

PRESA UNIVERSITARĂ CLUJEANĂ

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Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai
Presa Universitară Clujeană
Director: Codruța Săcelean
Str. Hasdeu nr. 51
400371 Cluj-Napoca, România
Tel./fax: (+40)-264-597.401
E-mail: editura@ubbcluj.ro
<http://www.editura.ubbcluj.ro/>

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Foreword

The goal of this volume is to provide students *in and of* linguistics in general, but particularly those enrolling in the Internet Linguistics course we have designed for an MA programme at the Faculty of Letters of Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj, with an argument for the application of the Cultural Sociolinguistic approach to this domain of linguistics. Our end objective has dictated a simple and straightforward structure for what we have also designed as a vehicle for publicising a selection of productions by student graduates in the course and a set of invited contributions by academics with core or subsidiary interests in the field. The volume, therefore, comprises two sections, with the one, an introductory theoretical study by the editors, the other, a compilation of invited papers and graduate productions. This, we feel, is a transparent narrow-targeting of the current and potential students in the course abovementioned, as well as of the community of scholars of Internet Linguistics across the meridians of academia.

Hence, the first part of the volume combines a plea and a pledge for applying the perspective of Cultural Sociolinguistics to the domain of Internet Linguistics. We rely on the cursory observation that communication occurring on the Internet – especially in the Social Media – whether interpersonal and dialogic, or personal and monologic, stirs thought and fuels research where three domains of Linguistics intersect: Sociolinguistics, Internet Linguistics and Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis. The analytical unit in Sociolinguistics – the Sociolinguistic item – can be a phonological, phonetic, morphological, lexical, or syntactical element or feature that indexes variation in language and systematic correlation with social aspects and demographic segments. Within the domain, the discourse parsing of a text also matches Sociolinguistic analysis, which makes the case

for the point above, that is, that the Sociolinguistic angle to Internet Linguistics partially overlaps with Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis as regards research objects and subjects. And since interpersonal communication in the Social Media is cued by the rapport between the interlocutors and the symbolic power dynamics as alternately reflected in the symmetry or the asymmetry of the dialogue, Critical Discourse Analysis is a welcome addition to the theoretical cocktail of theories applicable to the domain of Internet Linguistics. Last, but not least, the notion of identity is the main ingredient in the mix, a catalyst welding all of the above into the scientific scrutiny of its very emergence, construction or negotiation in the digital medium and of its interplay across the 'real' and the virtual channels of communication.

Our introductory study examines the research methodologies that best lend themselves to the study of the discipline approached from the Cultural Sociolinguistics angle, paying heed to our designated graduate readership and their expected academic performance. The academic duration of the course we have devised is limited to one semester by the curriculum, and has thus mandated us to be selective rather than exhaustive with the topics we tackle. In the same, yet beneficial, vein, let us note that the languages in which the case-study papers have been elaborated are English, French and Romanian. We thus acquiesce with the MA programme in regard to multilingualism. The programme has made it its mission to actively encourage multilingualism, and, therefore, to foster it as the default language practice amongst all the course participants, tutors and tutees alike. At the same time, it is the editors' way of acknowledging the multilingual feature of the Internet and of communication therein and of its worthiness for research within the proposed paradigm.

What may appear as the editors' penchant for the Social Media platforms, where they have anchored the crux of their knowledge- and empirical-based observations and suggestions in their introductory theoretical study, is a deliberate intention to strike a balance with the case-studies section in the volume. Here, the research reported by the contributing authors samples relevant linguistic phenomena within a wider

range of Internet channels and employs heterogeneous methodologies. The combination is a coherent choice, for Sociolinguistics has always relied on – in addition to its own – methods and instruments borrowed from related domains and subdomains, such as the social sciences, statistics, anthropology, ethnography, to name a few. Ourselves, we shall be depicting and arguing for a *nexus analysis* (see the introductory study) as part of our reasoning for a Cultural Sociolinguistics approach to Internet Linguistics.

We have compiled the contributions of 11 authors in the 10 *Case-Study* section of this volume, five of which are academics that either have Internet Linguistics or Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis as their main scientific interest, or as one that intersects with the particular strain of applied linguistic work they do. Their papers cover segments dealing with: emergent e-genres where metalinguistic comments on dedicated fora can be seen as forging an identity for non-specialists attempting to take precedence over professionals by hyperbolising their position as self-designated connoisseurs on matters professional (Liana Pop); the negotiation of identities on IT-related fora (Cristina Varga), remarking on the diversification of what, once, was a straightforward and irreducible antithetic pair: the amateur vs. the professional, the one asking, the other offering, advice on IT troubleshooting; the rating in terms of the development of digital and intercultural communication competences within a virtual and simulation project in teaching and the varied aspects connected to online collaborative work, by the participants who primarily identify in terms of their professional status; the construction and instantiation of a glocal identity through online communication on Facebook and YouTube by users and content creators who choose irony as the vehicle, and the Internet as the avenue, for venting out their negative emotions vis-a-vis the COVID pandemic-generated restrictions and the related sociopolitical deregulations (Anamaria Radu and Alexandra Cotoc). To this, we have added the productions of five graduate students who, during their linguistic formal education, have either taken our course or nurtured a keen interest in Computer Mediated Communication, and a sixth by a doctoral student currently working on a promising thesis counting as a contribution

to research in the domain. Their studies scrutinise such topics as open-source identities in livestreaming (Laura Herțanu), gossip as a gendered form of talk on the Net (Marina Cioacă), hashtagging as a multisemantic and technical tool professionally or intuitively used by a varied category of Social Media users (Mihaela Buzec), *cancel culture* as a concept that has become the prevalent carrier of a particular ideology and which has permeated mainstream mentality and conceptual vocabulary (Martina Lončeková), face-threatening acts on Facebook (Alina Ploscaru), and the language of trolling on YouTube, TikTok and Reddit (Mădălina Pop). We have encouraged our students to refine their course-related written assignments into scientific papers, which in turn have been processed into contributions to this volume. Indeed, our didactic aim, here, is twofold. On the one hand, it purposes to disseminate scientific knowledge and know-how to graduate students in general Linguistics in the form of a guide to applying the Cultural (identity oriented) Sociolinguistics angle to Internet Linguistics. This includes developing the ability to select from among the classical sociolinguistics tenets and notions the ones more amenable to textual (text *per se* and images) digital interaction, to recognise the need for their revisitation and even reconceptualisation on account of the alternately constraining, facilitative and enabling features of the digital platforms as technology add-ons, to internalise the unprecedented concepts and notions that have been generated by digital interpersonal communication research against today's demographic and implicitly sociocultural contexts. Indeed, in some geopolitical locations they have been hailed as beyond diverse by a whole school of researchers, against a space-time backdrop repositied as a continuum of chronotopes (where we are concerned). Thus, (some) sociolects have been observed as undergoing a superdiversification of sorts, the direct result of sociocultural segmentation, proliferation of the physical and virtual channels and patterns of communication, and of the branching out of the functions of language. We argue that the hermeneutics of Internet Linguistics is 'treble-some', for it leans on Sociolinguistics, Pragmatics and Semiotics for operation, and because it has to stay on top of the social and cultural changes moulding the current real and virtual communities into

hypercomplex and hyper-connected/-connectable groupings. On the other hand, it is inherent to our aim that we provide part of our targeted (student) public with a set of 'model' case-study papers by former graduate participants in our course and, hopefully, persistent researchers of and reporters on Internet Linguistics. Last and not least, the specialty references in the collection of studies comprised in the volume can be used as indicative bibliography.

If our volume does not provide the ultimate research results to the empirical studies conducted, and is qualitative rather than quantitative analytically speaking, we have, nevertheless, made efforts to keep track of the evolutions of a relatively new area of research, where Cultural Sociolinguistics is theoretically and analytically operational, but also an approach still to be reckoned with. We have, thus, foregrounded some seminal directions of research and the more recent accompanying findings on digital textual practices, so as to give our students and the researchers in the field a sense of the freshness and the flavour of Internet Linguistics heuristics, something they may already have intuited as users, content consumers and creators, but of which they may, now, have a systematic, analytical grasp.

The Editors

Author Bio-Notes

Mihaela BUZEC is a PhD student at the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Her main research interest lies within generative grammar, and she is currently studying the linguistic behaviour of aphasiacs and possible correlations with the faculty of language. She has previously published works and presented papers on Old English onomastics and kennings, linguistic relativity, and the control phenomenon within the Minimalist program.

Marina CIOACĂ is currently a secondary school English teacher. She holds a BA in Philology and an MA in Linguistics. Her dissertation is on gossip as a linguistic practice, revolving around the differentiated linguistic patterns and their respective correlations with gender and power positions. She has further developed the topic by devising a comparison between their online and face-to-face instantiations.

Alexandra COTOC is Lecturer PhD in the Department of English Language and Literature at the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University, Romania. Her scientific fields of interest are Internet Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, Discourse Analysis, New Media Studies, Online Identity, English for Academic Purposes and Digital Humanities. She is an alumna of the European Summer School in Digital Humanities in Leipzig, Germany. She was a member of the ClipFlair project (Foreign Language Learning through Interactive Revoicing and Captioning of Clips), Barcelona, Spain. A selection of publications includes: Radu, Anamaria, Alexandra Cotoc (2021), "RomGlobish – The Dynamic Code of Romanian YouTubers", in *Journal of Romanian Literary Studies*. Issue 24/2021. International Romanian Humanities Journal, Târgu-Mureş: Arhipelag XXI Press, 722-732; Cotrău, Diana,

Alexandra Cotoc (2019), „Glocalised Humour in the New Media”, in Adrian Radu, Octavian More (eds.), *Selected Papers of the International Conference Constructions of Identity 9*, 27-29 October 2017, Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, pp.166-175; Cotrău, Diana and Alexandra Cotoc (eds.) (2019), *Online and Offline Discourses. New Worlds, New Sociolinguistic Perspectives*, Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană; Cotrău, Diana, Alexandra Cotoc (2018), “Social Capital Bridging through Sociopolitical and Religious References in Computer-Mediated Communication. A Study Case of a Mediated Local Drama”, in *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies (JSRI)*, Volume 17, Issue 50, Summer, pp. 109-124; Cotoc, Alexandra (2017), *Language and Identity in Cyberspace. A Multidisciplinary Approach*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană.

Diana COTRĂU is Associate professor at Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj, Romania. Her core academic work has been devoted to teaching and researching fresh topics in domains such as ESP, Intercultural Communication, Cultural Sociolinguistics, and Internet Linguistics. More recently she has been focusing on the online discourse construction of identities and textual (semiotic and linguistic) architecture in the Social Media. Her single-author and collaborative published work includes several textbooks, volumes and papers on topics pertaining to the domains abovementioned: *Youth Identity in Media Discourse. A Sociolinguistic Perspective* (2008), *Studies in Language, Culture, and the Media* (2009), *English for Students in History. Intermediate and English for Students in History. Upper-Intermediate* (2003), *English A1-B1* (2008), *English B2-C1. Ethnology, Letters, Drama, Religion, History, Philosophy* (2008), *Online and Offline Discourses. New Worlds, New Sociolinguistic Perspectives* (2019). She has coordinated thematic issues of the *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai PHILOLOGIA* journal and has been a member of several national and international research projects. Diana Cotrău is associate editor for the *European Language Journal* (Liverpool University Press) and member of the editorial board for the *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*. She currently holds a member mandate in the Board of the European Language Council (CEL/ELC).

Laura Oana HERȚANU is a PhD candidate whose research is an exclusive combination of media studies, psychology, and social sciences, as she aims to advance the emerging topic of identity development in online video games broadcasting. Her longitudinal ethnographic approach is set up to yield findings that are significant for both academic theory – with an impact on cultural studies, digital humanities – and related industry; her PhD project mediates between the two in order to better understand how actual live-streaming individuals change and develop with the technological platforms that make their hobbies or careers possible. As part of her previous work, Laura has published the article “Development of online identity in live-streaming” in *EXPLORING THE DIGITAL TURN*, 2018, Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, and has presented her work at multiple national and international conferences.

Martina LONČEKOVÁ is a Master’s student at the Department of British and American Studies at Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice. Her main area of interest is the study of the language of the Internet from the sociolinguistic perspective, including the language of the press. Previous work includes the bachelor thesis focused on the Language of the British press.

Oana PAPUC is Junior Lecturer at the Department of Foreign Languages for Specific Purposes of Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj. Her research interests are diverse, ranging from outlining online expressions of identity and otherness through language use, to interdisciplinary niche-topics such as contemporary sociolinguistic trends manifesting in subcultural artistic creation. Multicultural and multimodal forms of online communication are included here as well. Most recent publication in sole authorship: “Code-switching, Informal Multilingual Exchanges and Expressions of Identity in the Classroom under CLIL and ESP Guidelines”. Proceedings of AELFE-TAPP 2021 (19th AELFE Conference, 2nd TAPP Conference), “Multilingual academic and professional communication in a networked world”. Publications in co-authorship with Diana Cotrău:

“Chronotopic Identities in Self-Narratives and Dedicated Web Texts: the Young Romanian Returnee” (2020), in Pârlog Hortensia (ed.) B.A.S./British and American Studies, and “Returnee Vlogging and Culturalist Discourse” (2020) in Agnes-Farkas, Imola; Adriana Todea (eds.) The Science of Linguistics: Papers in Honour of Ştefan Oltean.

Alina PLOSCARU is a PhD candidate at the Linguistics Department of the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Her main interests are the English and Japanese languages, and her main field of study is generative syntax. She is also concerned with sociolinguistics and has an interest in etymology. Her published works so far are: „English and Japanese Inner Aspect” in *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, vol 3, No. 10 (2020), „Resultatives and state-result readings in Japanese”, unpublished conference paper presented to *Sesiunea științifică a Școlii Doctorale de Studii Lingvistice și Literare*, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, 14th of May 2021, „Exploring Cognate Object Constructions in Japanese” in *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai PHILOGIA*, vol. LXVI, no. 1, (2021).

Liana POP, Emeritus Professor, is a specialist in French and Romanian linguistics at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj. She created and published two original discourse analysis models: *Espaces discursifs. Pour une représentation des hétérogénéités discursives* (Peeters, Louvain-Paris, 2000), and *La grammaire graduelle, à une virgule près* (Peter Lang, 2005). She was the director of several language teaching projects at Echinex Publishing House: the “with or without teacher” book series for Romanian, French, English, and German, and the *Autodidact* book series, for Romanian, French, English, German and Russian (<http://granturi-ubbcluj.ro/autodidact>). She co-authored *Grammaire du roumain. Romanian Grammar. Gramatica limbii române*, 1997/2019; *Nivel Prag. Pentru învățarea limbii române ca limbă străină* [Threshold Level. For Learning Romanian as L2/a Foreign Language], European Council, Strasbourg, 2002; *Scurtă gramatică. Româna ca limbă străină* [Concise Grammar. Romanian as L2/Foreign Language], 2002; *Europe ensemble: Noi deschideri pentru limbi* [Europe Together. New Opportunities for Languages], SCEREN, CRDP Pays

de la Loire, 2008. She manages the *Centre of Pragmatics for Communication* at the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj.

Mădălina Andreea POP has completed a master's degree in Linguistics at the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University, where she studied Internet linguistics among other subjects. She holds a BA in English language and literature and Japanese language and literature. She obtained a job working as an English teacher in an academy in Madrid, Spain, in autumn. Her main scientific interest is sociolinguistics, being curious about how languages can change due to different social phenomena. She loves learning about languages and sharing this passion through teaching.

Raluca POP is Lecturer PhD at the Faculty of Psychology and Sciences of Education, Babeş-Bolyai University, Romania. Her research area comprises communication skills, intercultural communicative competence, digital literacy, and teaching English and Norwegian as foreign languages. She teaches various pre-service teacher training courses: The Didactics of English and of Norwegian, Teaching English with the help of ICT tools or Teacher training practice. Some of her publications are: (2020). *Fostering New Literacies in Teaching Norwegian as a Foreign Language. Studia UBB Philologia*, 65/3, (2020), *An Intercultural Perspective in Teaching the Didactics of the English Language*, e-book, (2019), *Implementing Online Collaborative Learning in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. A Pre-service Teacher Training Perspective* in Wohl E. (ed.), *Limbaje specializate: Perspective și linii de convergență*, (2019), *Cunoștințe, abilități și atitudini interculturale în predarea limbii engleze. O redimensionare a rolurilor cadrului didactic* in Prodea C., Albulescu M.P. (coord.), *Studii de Didactica Științelor Socio-Umane. Confluențe, restituiri, studii de caz, analize, recenzii*, (2018), *Foreign Language Learning in Today's Multicultural and Multilingual Classrooms. Studia UBB, Philologia*, vol. 61, nr. 3/2016, (2016).

Anamaria RADU is Junior Lecturer in the Department of Romanian Language, Culture and Civilization at Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Currently she is a lecturer at the Institut für Romanistik

at the University of Regensburg, Germany. In addition to teaching and evaluating the Romanian language as a foreign language, her research interests include Language Acquisition, Sociolinguistics, Internet Linguistics, Discourse Analysis, and Digital Humanities. She was a member of the ClipFlair, RLNM, EVRO and ROMIMAG projects. Recent studies: (2020), “Tell Me Your Favourite Urbochrematonym and I’ll Tell You If You’re A Hipster”, in *Annales Universitatis Apulensis, Series Philologica*, pp. 230-241 (2020); “Cyberlimb@j în spațiul lingvistic românesc”, in *Enciclopedia imaginariilor din România*, Vol. 2: Patrimoniu și imaginar lingvistic la Editura Polirom, (2020); “RomGlobish – The Dynamic Code of Romanian YouTubers”, in *Journal of Romanian Literary Studies*. Issue 24/2021. International Romanian Humanities Journal, Târgu-Mureș: Arhipelag XXI Press.

Cristina VARGA is Senior lecturer of Faculté des Humanités, of Université Catholique de l’Ouest in Angers and Assistant Professor of Modern Languages Department at Universitatea “Babeș-Bolyai” in Cluj-Napoca (Romania) where she teaches *New Technologies Applied to Translation, Computer Assisted Translation tools, Corpus for translators, Localization, Audiovisual translation (subtitling), and Terminology*. Since 2007 she has been a collaborator of the Department of Translation and Language Sciences at Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, where she teaches subtitling. Cristina Varga holds a PhD from Universitatea “Babeș-Bolyai” in Cluj-Napoca and Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Diss: *Knowledge Transmission in Cyberspace. Discourse Analysis of Professional Web Forums as Internet Subgenre*. She has an extended teaching experience abroad (France, Belgium, and Spain). Her areas of work and research include: discourse analysis, corpus-based linguistics, creation and management of multilingual corpora, machine translation, terminology, audiovisual translation and localization. Some of her publications are the following: “Behind the Titles of the Computer Web Forums Threads. A Discursive Approach” in CUREA Anamaria, PAPAHAĞI Cristiana, FEKETE Monica, MORARU Sanda, MANOLE Veronica, *Discours en présence. Hommage à Liana Pop*, 2015, Lessico panlatino della Smart City (EN-FR-IT-ES-CAT-RO) coord. Claudio Grimaldi, Elisa Romagnoli, Milano: EDUCatt, “Crowdsourcing y neología” in *La Renovación Léxica en las Lenguas*

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I. INTRODUCTORY STUDY

A Pledge for the Cultural Sociolinguistic Approach to the Domain of Internet Linguistics

DIANA COTRĂU, ALEXANDRA COTOC, OANA PAPUC

Ours are times whose principal traits are high speed and the acceleration thereof in all walks of life. Communication, be it in person or digital, between the habitants of a wired global village (McLuhan, 1964; Targowski, 1990; Levinson, 1993) that has matured into a veritable cosmopolis, has fallen in step with the generalised increasing pace of our existence, and has adjusted its mechanisms and manifestations accordingly. Or, perhaps, the converse is the case, that is, it is communication that is leading the race and impressing a pace on us all. Today, the impending pressure to adapt to both has found an extra readily identifiable cause among a plethora of others: the repercussions of the COVID pandemic-related, and notably social, crisis. Within the past few decades our existence has already been undergoing some radical changes it still needs to convene with, an unwelcome and unresolved addition to our common immediate goal today, that of not becoming overwhelmed by an unprecedented global pandemic. Indeed, the rapid progress of the technology of communication and its subsidiaries, whose every mention henceforward is superfluous, has met its match in people across the world swiftly, yet not optimally, switching to remote work entailing the intensive use of internet technology and logistics. Perhaps, this is a timely moment for a reconsideration of the relationship between man and technology as regards the relaying of information and conducting communication. We take this opportunity to state that, consequently, scholarly research in, and theorising of, the domain of Internet

Linguistics – an interdisciplinary field comprising elements from social semiotics, linguistics and information technology – should, too, have its variants rearranged and allow for alternative frames of interpretations within the emerging niches. All the more so, as the Covid context has affected the predictable patterns of communication and behaviour on the Net, for under the psychological (and not only) pressure induced, certain tendencies have prevailed over others and caused a higher incidence of some types of ‘talk’ as social action (a substitute for the physical ones varyingly limited by government-imposed Covid regulations). One such example indicating the proliferation and branching out of digital activities and tendencies, and the need for the corresponding subdomains to catch up with these developments is the explicit message in a call for papers introducing *Pandemic digitalities*, worded as an acknowledgement of “the rapid and extensive increase, reliance and shifts in meaning of digital technologies in the age of COVID-19 and post-COVID futurities across various spheres”. (Source: <http://commlist.org/archive/calls/2021-all/msg00404.html>) Indeed, Internauts have not only changed some of their digital patterns of communicative behaviour, but possibly their lifestyles, to mention the increasingly appealing and pragmatically picturesque case of the *digital nomads*. (Source: <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/business-news/office-life-beckons-again-pandemic-s-digital-nomads-weigh-benefits-n1273000>)

Internet Linguistics is seemingly a misnomer from the perspective we are taking in this volume, and that is because we have delineated a particular niche framework. Internet linguistics has been advocated and defined by David Crystal (2011) as the study of new language styles and forms that have arisen under the influence of the Internet and the Social Media, which was accurate and unequivocal at the moment when it was enunciated. Previously, Susan Herring (1996) had already made some definitive statements about Computer Mediated Communication by titling her seminal work in an unequivocal, self-explanatory manner: *Computer-mediated communication: Linguistic, social, and cross-cultural perspectives*. More recently, Gretchen McCulloh (2019), self-proclaimed pop-linguist, in her famous Internet Linguistics bestseller *Because Internet: Understanding the New Rules of*

Language provides the latest informed update on language use in the Internet and not only. However, it is indubitable to scholars and laymen alike, that the language and the channels of modern communication are past traditional proclivities and have become fully attuned to the global tendencies to step-up an already high pace of general advancement. And while Internet Linguistics is undoubtedly *a* discipline with a *multi-* and *inter-*disciplinary scope, which invites the scrutiny of quite an array of researchers of the linguists' guild representing Sociolinguistics, Pedagogy and Education, Stylistics, Discourse analysis and Applied Linguistics as a collective nomer (to randomly name a few), we are advocating an approach that we regard as overly congenial to the analysis of the languaculture phenomena manifest in digital communication. The joint impact of the changes and shifts produced by the progress in communication technology and the sociocultural segmentation of the current generations, who cannot be defined in the absence of communication and technology with which they coexist symbiotically, must be integrated in the related scholarly theories and applied to the interpretation of empirical findings. We, thus, side with the particular proposition of a perspective that conflates Cultural Sociolinguistics, meta-Pragmatics and Semiotics. The unit of analysis is the *text* in a broad sense, encapsulating language, the semiotic architecture of images and the multimodality of comments, posts or other irreducible forms of generated digital content, which taken together can, however, be deconstructed into form, meaning, and function.

The observations and ensuing suggestions we posit – some of which may be partially intuitive and slightly impressionistic (as was sometimes the way in the early history of the social sciences), others fully grounded in science – are primarily underpinned by the cultural sociolinguistic angle. This is the scientific claim and pledge we regularly make in the introduction to the course we are currently holding as part of an MA programme (see *Foreword*). Indeed, the present volume is designed as a provider of a theoretical outline of a particular approach to the discipline of Internet Linguistics. It is also committed to bringing forth a selection of the theories propounded by some of the current trailblazers in the domain of (Cultural)

Sociolinguistics and the identity turn. Likewise, it is also our certitude that Critical Discourse Analysis could only be incremental to the interpretation of empirical findings on the manifestation of digital identities emerging in the process of communication, as would meta-pragmatics for examining the management of communication, the relaying and decoding of messages, and the functionality of ‘speech’ acts on the virtual platforms. At the center of all is the study of emergent identities, the affordances of the platforms prompting their construction and/or the constraints of the same faulting the process, and, ultimately, the comparison with its equivalent in the ‘real’ world, of which we have a deeper understanding. We shall not insist on the definitions of the classical sociolinguistic tenets and notions, on the tacit understanding that they are known to our public, but we will delve into the novel ones that lodge relevance for our scientific objective and have generated new concepts for the emergent digital text phenomena.

Internauts make a particularly enticing subject for Cultural Sociolinguistic study in a society where “the construction of individual identity has become the fundamental social act”. (Allan, 2008: 153) Their communicative behaviour and textual deployments on the digital platforms provide ample and self-reinventing material for special analysis. The reasons for the Netizens’ digital engagement with the Internet platforms range from the instant gratification provided by the consumption of simple and facile content to the efforts involved in conducting successful interpersonal communication, putting on public display a certain image of the self, garnering approval, militating for and disseminating a cause, and even trolling. The direct result of such high digital engagement enabled by the technological features of the digital platforms by their convergence and potential for hyperconnectivity is the rise of *convergence cultures*. (Jenkins, 2006) Androutsopoulos’s (2013, 2016) own insights emphasise a social-action orientation of the digital-based cultures and signals the aggregation of Net groups and the accompanying identity expression, which he names suggestively *participatory cultures*. The term bespeaks a need of belonging that is readily afforded and met by the social platforms, sustained engagement, alongside the current propensity to state one’s affiliations and

to commune with people adhering to shared ideologies or intersubjectivities. Through their regular interaction with the social arenas of the Net, they become the cogwheels of the social dynamics that they engender and the platforms afford. By participating in the cultures bred by the Internet, the digital citizens will inherently shape for themselves or assume more than one situated identity. What makes the process even more challenging for the actors themselves, and worthwhile for researchers, is that Netizens can and may be simultaneously the members of several groups, which entails consistent identity management work. And the self-engrossing act of opting for a particular persona from within their repertoire of identities as subject to a specific context (channel of communication, topic, rapport, and, we should add, the pragmatic motivation behind the digital speech event) points to a presentational (and representational) culture (Marshall, 2010) as enabled by the Social Media in particular. Committed to communication on the Net, Netizens regularly present or disclose an updated identity or construct multiple identities, they categorize the other or make informed guesses about them. Risks are involved here, either in the form of misinterpreting the message resulting in miscommunication, or in becoming the victim of stereotyping or of rash value judgments. Net users will find, however, the tools to ward off the danger or prevent matters from escalating on the very platforms they are exposing themselves to such dangers. They may employ the instruments made available by technology (for instance, adjusting the public-private ratio settings, selecting an audience for the content posted, deleting, editing and reediting content, blocking an unwanted interlocutor, or even taking such definitive actions as deleting one's Social Media account(s)). And speaking of fast digital communication developments and the need to keep less than one step behind in order to produce the associated concepts, one such novel phenomenon (and syndrome) has emerged triggering an appropriate terminology: *digital disengagement* (Adi Kuntsman, Sam Martin and Esperanza Miyake), part of the growing field of Disconnection Studies. This is a framework developed to examine digital media from the point of view of disconnection, refusal, and opting out. Even these paradigital (technical) actions undertaken as

reactions to locutor prompts evaluated as hostile can be considered to be indexing certain dimensions of one's identity.

Opting in is the reverse alternative. A possible example comes from a phenomenon which can produce political and ideology laden derivatives. The term *digital panopticon* has come into existence inspired by Bentham's panopticon: "a work of architecture, ... [which] allows a watchman to observe occupants without the occupants knowing whether or not they are being watched". This explains by analogy how users of the Social Media through surveillance can gain perspectives on others. (Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/jul/23/panopticon-digital-surveillance-jeremy-bentham>) This is more than lurking or behaving as a voyeurist on the extravert others who are overexposing themselves. Indeed, many 'genuine' members of the presentational culture embellish their digital image and share it in the system in a narcissistic feat that transgresses the boundaries between the private and the public. For instance, users post pictures (particularly on Instagram) of themselves on holidays, at the gym, posing, enjoying special dishes or drinks. They make sure the online projection of their selves captures the most advantageous moments, to constitute an improved version of the user.

Opting in may also imply the choice to engage in digital militancy and activism. Digital engagement in and work for a cause is underestimated by many and such terms as have been coined directly point to what is thought by some to be wrong with it. (Source: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/>)

Slacktivism – working to achieve political or social change by using the internet to carry out actions that are thought to require little effort or time

Clicktivism – the activity of supporting a political or social cause by using the internet to carry out actions that are thought to require little effort or time

However, critical observations have led to the conclusions that "[the] digital media are critical for contemporary activism" and even low-effort clicktivism is politically consequential and can influence or even translate to

actual offline participation. (Freelon, Marwick, Kreiss, 2020) One of our own studies has reached a similar notion, and an even more generous conclusion. However, the conclusion forwarded by our study cannot be generalised, since our results were derived from the analysis of a local case as conjectured by a particular sociopolitical situation, which anticipated some events bound to happen as a result of societal discontent rather than under the influence of the coincidental online activism. (Cotrău, Cotoc, 2019)

Equal note should be taken of the need to anchor findings and interpretation of emerging digital identity in the dynamics of change of sociocultural identities in the 'real' world. Of course, one cannot speak of an antinomy between real-life and digital personas. On the contrary, comparisons are possible and beneficial. Thus, if it has been claimed by some that the notion of fixed identity can be relegated to offline actions, and fluidity may be more readily associated with online manifestations, such divide is not absolute. We should be looking to the interplay between the two for establishing how alternative identities are forged for individuals today, the majority of which cannot imagine social life in the absence of the Internet network sites.

Sociocultural identities

Jenkins' (2014) definition of social identity (posited and then revisited in each of the three ensuing editions of a book that is canonical in matters of social anthropology) has gradually come to focus (philosophically) on the *becoming* rather than on the *being*, that is, on how identity emerges from the interplay between self-identification and external categorization in a wide range of settings. We would add that, today, any definition of identity or of categories of individuals must also integrate the cultural dimension. The social dimension has become inextricably linked to the cultural one, with individuals resorting regularly for information to both their social and cultural capitals when engaging in self- or other-identification work. It is reasonable, then, that any analysis of our age's kaleidoscopic identities and of their production should conflate the social and the cultural compounds of

identity-in-the-making. Blommaert and a number of researchers following his overarching line of work in Sociolinguistics adduced the notion of chronotopes (with Bakhtin as the originator in the 1930s), to rationalise the reconception of speech communities and sociolinguistic identities. Synthetically, and in his own words:

[...] the study of language in society has moved the field increasingly away from linear models toward complex models. The complexity of timespace as an aspect of what is called context is of key importance in this development, and ... engages ... two possibly useful concepts in view of this: chronotope and scale. Chronotope can be seen as invocable chunks of history that organize the indexical order of discourse; scale, in turn, can be seen as the scope of communicability of such invocations. Thus, whenever we see chronotopes, we see them mediated by scales. The cultural stuff of chronotopes is conditioned by the sociolinguistic conditions of scale. This nuanced approach to timescale contextualization offers new directions for complexity-oriented research ... (Blommaert, 2015)

Cultural Sociolinguistics narrow-targets the construction of identity through and in speech either as deliberate action or as liminal expression. It involves the work and social savviness of interlocutors in a speech situation, be it fatic or communion-enabling. That is, 'behind the scenes' the locutors elicit sociocultural information from the speech episodes they witness or participate in and use it to certain ends. These efforts are replicated online, but there arose the need for the reconceptualisation of the language-identity-culture triad primarily due to the Netizens' idiosyncratic identity work on the digital platforms. By integrating the new insights, Cultural Sociolinguistics theorisations have propounded a novel take on how identity is constructed. By way of a feedback loop, these provide the new fundamentals for the interpretation of the current findings in the domain, which have to take into consideration the fact that the affordances of Social Media have augmented the propensity of Internauts for constructing a repertoire of *Self*-identities and alternative ways of categorising the *Other*. Identities have become and are theorised as flexible, fluid, liquid (Allan, 2008), as underpinned by internal psychological drives or external macro-processes such as globalisation, hybridisation and deglobalisation. Claiming that

identities are fixed and permanent is an overstatement. Rather, a combination of the two notions of identity is the result of an interplay between the Old World and New World communicative behaviours and of the online-offline manifestations and representations of identity. In fact, there has been a paradigm shift to the relational view of identity – how Social Media users communicate even while they are constructing an identity for themselves or disclosing it, partially due to the rise of screen-mediated interactions where the lines of communication and turns-at-talk have become ‘invisible’ when compared to offline interactions.

Enregisterment of Internet Language and revisiting the multilingual Internet

It has been established that technology influences language, therefore the enregisterment of an internet-specific language variety and its features has been a seminal matter for sociolinguists to solve. Squires (2010) invites a lengthy discussion about the issue, by pointing out a contradictory aspect:

[...] metadiscourse provides evidence of a shared concept of internet language as comprising distinctive written features, primarily acronyms, abbreviations, and respellings. Internet language’s enregisterment emerges from standard language ideology and deterministic views of technology, where the construal of these features as both nonstandard and internet-specific articulates the perceived distinctiveness of internet interactions. Yet empirical evidence shows that these features are relatively rare in instant messaging conversations, one form of interaction to which internet language is attributed; this discrepancy has implications for the application of indexical order to enregisterment.

An additional aspect that we can contend with, that is, the established fact that the Internet is multilingual (Danet, Herring, 2007) should be made part of this paradigm. Multilingualism has been of late insistently redefined as so many anticanonical variations: metrolingualism, translanguaging, polylinguaging. The offer to substitute them for the orthodox notion of multilingualism has been pressed on by researchers and theorists observant of the language practices of today in socially, culturally and linguistically

superdiverse contexts. In a professed move away from purist and normative attitudes to deregulation in plurilingual contexts, the three alternatives to multilingualism are seen primarily as resources generated by superdiversity (Androutsopoulos, Juffermans, 2014), a linguacultural phenomenon stemming from the crossing of identity and speech repertoires of individuals in communities. And, we should add, that it is evident that language, culture and identity work, where technology use is endemic, form almost an organic trio.

This is applicable to the individual users of social media, but also to the generic Internaut. For the latter, we can speak of a universal set of features where we can enlist creativity, an emphatic preference for authenticity and a ludic approach to communication. Perhaps creativity is one of the defining traits that is largely accepted as a positive one amid concerns that the regular engagement in communication on the Net and the adoption of covert, marginal conventions for writing (mainly by young people and adolescents) will engender a cognitive and behavioural reflex that will affect writing practices in the realm of 'reality' and ultimately lead to the demise of standard language. However, it has been said (by Crystal, repeatedly) that the adopters of unorthodox normativity know full well what they are doing and can and will discriminate between (and comply to) normative practices when necessary. Creativity, where they are concerned, finds a material form through several graphological as well as lexical, grammatical and orthographic innovations. There are instances where the coinage of new words or terms to denote meta- and para-digital practices cannot be directly attributable either to the users themselves, to the platform creators or to those studying the digital media. Relexicalisation and/or overlexicalisation have generated new words whose etymology is traceable and transparent. Some of the lexical items are limited to online medium use only, where they are necessary, adequate and applicable in the first place, while others translated to offline, where they are employed for a lack of equivalents to denominate something that is actually impracticable in 'real' life. To enumerate a few, we exemplify with: *to hashtag*, *to heart* (a comment), *to unfriend* or *to friendzone* (somebody), *clicktivism*, etc.

Hashtagging lends itself to complex readings and interpretations. It can function differently across the digital platforms, it is liable of complex semantics and may also be fraught with ideology. For instance, in Romania, *haștagiștii* (the Romanian equivalent of the English *hashtaggers*) is used to label the prevalently young people who display their social unrest and general disgruntlement in the streets organising marches, stand-ins or “occupy ...” kind of protest actions. In one of our previous studies (Cotrău and Cotoc, 2019: 167-168), the way researchers and users respectively use and make use of the hashtag (alternately, for collecting corpus, for data-mining, for identifying individuals holding similar creeds and embracing common causes, for bonding based on shared intersubjectivities) has been central to our scientific pursuit:

as a corpus gathering instrument and semantic tool ... [that] contributes to the compilation of multimodal posts and entries. It is a two-fold instrument. It is used by the content creators to produce multimodal discourse and to link discourses on the same topics. It is also used by Netizens to trace down the relevant posts and comments. The hashtag allows for topic retrieval using one or more words, phrases, structures and even entire sentences. The words can be separated from one another using hashtags, narrowing down the scope of the query or adding different (semantic / pragmatic) dimensions to the same topic. The hashtag is both an affordance which allows users to be creative and a metadata tag which allows them to produce messages/posts which are easily found by other users who share the same interests. The use of the hashtag leads to a “searchable talk” and encourages collaboration among digi-participants by providing “conversational tagging” (Zappavigna, 2012 and 2015, Huang, Hornton, and Efthimiadis, 2010) as it engages users in digital content production. The hashtag contributes to the construction of a threaded item of information in which users from all over the world can negotiate a glocal identity, the latter reflecting an interplay between local and a variety of exogenous ideas, attitudes and practices. The emerged glocal identity is, at once, the participatory culture invited by the media event and the “imagined community” (Joseph, 2004) providing a group identity for the users who contribute to these threads. It is an instrument of signalling group identities and building participatory transient communities.

Constructing and deconstructing multimodal identity in social media

Identity construction in social media is a process of selective self-presentation involving practices and the interplay between online and offline identities. It is directly influenced by issues of privacy (concerns), platform affordances and the targeted audience. From a presentational point of view, social media users have in mind a public, or rather, publics, or “personal publics” defined as “the multitude of overlapping, hybrid, public/private spaces that are constituted by each individual user’s account and its network of followers” according to Jan-Hinrik Schmidt (2014) in his analysis of Twitter. At times, online identity construction displays evidence of a blurring of the private-public divide. There are instances where the interaction on Social Media may cover a private event or moment which is shared online, thus becoming public discourse. This is reachable by means of a hyperlink or hashtag and in this way, it becomes part of a distributed system. As such, it is a vehicle for transferring personal beliefs and attitudes to public discourse, in turn shaping the way in which particular behaviours and activities are perceived by the users. In this respect, the article “Images of Breastfeeding on Instagram: Self-Representation, Publicness, and Privacy Management” by Elisabetta Locatelli shows a clear example of an event which is conventionally private but has transcended into the public domain, impacting the way in which users perceive the event. Users’ digital activity is not, therefore, a matter of univocally dispensing information about oneself, but interacting with the other users, making an, and evaluating the, impact one makes, experimenting with one’s identity or simply letting it float.

Internauts may be regular users of several platforms or opt between them subject to preference or an interest, which may exert an influence on how they present themselves or how they come across to the other users. For instance, YouTube is not a platform exclusively for viewers, but also for content creators many of whom hope to be monetised (especially by capitalising on authenticity), as well as for vloggers and influencers in whose case the choice is underpinned by their availability for self-commodification. (Williams, 2006:205) Instagram enables users to construct an identity

through fast captions and visuals. Apparently, aestheticism is important to Instagram users, for they alter their forms of self-presentation by consistently stylising their captioned pictures. The combined need for controlling identity markers and less interest in authenticity is easily identifiable. TikTok-ers are mostly Generation Z. They switch between the digital and real worlds – seeing them complementary, a direct result, perhaps, of the fact they were born in the 1990's and raised in the 2000's during the most profound changes in the world of web, Internet, smart phones, laptops, freely available networks and digital media. They construct their digital identities through participatory cultures and they use more symbolistic imagery as compared to the lengthy, by comparison, forms of narrative self-expression encouraged by other platforms (Facebook). The content is less edited or polished to cater to an audience rather than to particular expressions of selfhood. On Facebook, holders of accounts will present themselves visually through a profile photo, and textually, by giving information about age, relationship status, origin, education, hobbies, interests, favourite quotes, etc. Specifically, Facebook identity construction is a continual process perfected through interaction with *Friends* on one's profile *Wall*.

The identity work carried out by social platform users, often a coherent and inseparable part of a digital interpersonal communication event, sometimes may bear traces of deindividuation or the converse, of hyperindividuality. If the latter is associated with influencers and their narcissistic drives, deindividuation can be looked at as having two alternatives, at least. The one is presented in analogy with wearing a mask and the realisation that online mask-wearing doesn't just conceal one's identity, it transforms it. This provides a psychological explanation for why disinhibition (prompted by the anonymity provided by the "mask") can degenerate into bullying, harassment, shaming. The other is manifest in what has been conceptualised as the SIDE (Social Identity Model of Deindividuation) effect (Reicher, Spears, Postmes) afforded by the digital platforms, which roughly means that just as in a mob-like situation where you are one of a crowd, you become conveniently anonymous due to sheer number or you can relinquish your identity in favour of that of the collective

acting as one. This may provide you with an excuse to act unaccountably or nonspecifically. However, the choice for anonymity in the two cases is contrastive. In the one case it is deliberate, in the other, it's a mix between a conscious act and the instinctual drive. As well, in the former case, the effects are amplified by a sense of the activity as separate from 'real' life and can be continued indefinitely, whereas in the latter, it is a matter of the spur of the moment, its momentousness dispersing fairly rapidly.

The Nexus analysis

While our Cultural Sociolinguistics angle to matters pertaining to Internet Linguistics can be taken literally, some clarifications need to be made. The theorising and methodology of this subdomain of Linguistics constitute a point where transgressions are possible. As mentioned above, from the very beginning, Sociolinguistics has borrowed some of the analytical tool kits of other related sciences such as sociology, biopsychology, statistics, etc. It is logical that Cultural Sociolinguistics should follow into its footsteps and complacently make even further borrowings. With this reasoning in mind and following examples provided by peers, we have concluded that the nexus analysis (Scollon) of how digital identities are enacted is the best option. A nexus analysis accounts for the fact that constructing one's identity online is a multimodal, multisemiotic and multilingual practice and it is calibrated by the users' metrodigiliteracies. It focuses on action – *id est*, on what people do rather than solely on what people say. It thus integrates what people do online with words and with the accompanying semiotic architecture. The medium, particularly the social platforms are customised for and foster metrolingual practices and multisemiotic communication. As well, action and creativity are at the center of the definition of metrolingualism, as representing creative linguistic practices across borders of culture, history and politics, beyond 'multilingualism' and 'multiculturalism', a product of modern and often urban interaction, describing the ways in which people of different and mixed backgrounds use, play with and negotiate identities through

language. The focus here is not so much on language systems as on languages as emergent from contexts of interaction. (Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010)

To conclude, we hope that all of the above has provided an argument sound enough to entice our readers to *opt in* (see above) and become students of Internet Linguistics from the angle we have indicated. We also hope that our insistent and, we assure you, persistent, advocacy of the Cultural Sociolinguistics approach will have delineated a paradigmatic framework within which we will be conducting our inquisitive collaborative research efforts in the proximate future.

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II. INVITED PAPERS

Leçons de « p'tits profs » sur la Toile

LIANA POP

RESUME : Leçons de « p'tits profs ». Cette étude se penche sur les activités métalinguistiques des utilisateurs de la Toile, et regarde de plus près les commentaires postés sur les divers aspects du langage. Le corpus observé (notamment des forums et commentaires) a révélé quelques nouveaux genres méta-communicatifs émergeant dans l'espace virtuel – textes dont devrait se réclamer une linguistique populaire virtuelle (*e-folklinguistics*) – produit de scripteurs allant de non spécialistes du langage (profanes, qui se disent parfois « p'tits profs »¹) vers des linguistes experts. Des systèmes linguistiques mentaux des utilisateurs en émergent.

Mots-clés : activités métalinguistiques virtuelles ; e-genres émergents ; e-folklinguistique ; lexique mental ; grammaire mentale.

Le constat à l'origine de cette recherche est celui de l'émergence de toute une série de *nouveaux genres métalinguistiques et métadiscursifs* dans l'espace numérique, résultats des commentaires concernant des aspects de la langue et de son utilisation : la propriété des termes et des expressions, les niveaux de langue, le respect des règles grammaticales, la cohérence des discours postés par les utilisateurs, etc. Après une brève revue des études déjà menées en la matière, nous allons illustrer quelques-uns de ces types textuels comme manifestations d'une *linguistique populaire dans l'espace virtuel*.

¹ <http://www.languefrancaise.net/forum/viewtopic.php?id=2487>

1. Recherches actuelles

Nous avons retenu des recherches sur les pratiques méta-communicatives des internautes chez Osthus (2003), Vicari (2009), Paveau (2012), Marcoccia (2012), Jacquet & Rosier (2014), Calabrese & Rosier (2015), Pop (2013, 2017, 2018, 2020²). Ces linguistes attirent l'attention sur

les amateurs de la langue qui font partie d'un grand discours métalinguistique [et sur le fait qu'] « il ne faut être ni linguiste ni Académicien pour juger sur le bon usage et les normes. Il suffit de se brancher sur Internet. Pour les gardiens – ou les contestataires – de la norme l'Internet a une double dimension. D'un côté, il présente une nouvelle plate-forme pour les activités dites de défense du français³ [1], de l'autre côté l'Internet lui-même a suscité d'importants travaux normatifs surtout dans le domaine de la terminologie » (Osthus 2003). Il s'agit, pour l'ensemble, d'« un renouveau du discours normatif sur la langue grâce à la toile. » (Osthus 2004, apud Rosier s.a. : 9)

Rappelons que ces discours profanes sur la langue, même avant l'Internet, ont reçu le nom de « linguistique populaire » (*folklinguistics*, Vicari 2009), avec, notamment, plusieurs pratiques métalinguistiques sur le *lexique*. Notre recherche va appuyer ce constat, et mettra en relief le fait que les activités métalinguistiques de ce type peuvent plus facilement rendre compte des *systèmes linguistiques mentaux* des scripteurs (lexique et grammaire), dont les posts sur les réseaux sociaux rendent implicitement ou explicitement compte.

Sur la constitution et l'émergence des lexiques mentaux, v. notamment : Changizi (2009), Aitchison (2011), Pasamonik (2011), Conti (2015), Wierzbicka (s.a.).

2. Méthodologie

Notre corpus de discours métalinguistiques sur Internet a été obtenu :

- d'un côté à l'aide d'une recherche par des expressions-clé comme :
Que signifie... ? Ça veut dire quoi... ? Qu'est-ce que cela signifie ?

² Cet article-même est une version de Pop 2018 et 2020.

³ [1] À titre d'exemple on peut nommer le site de l'association *Défense de la Langue Française* (D.L.F.) <http://www.langue-francaise.org>. Une sélection de sites internet relatifs aux questions normatives se trouve sur la page personnelle de Dietmar Osthus : <http://eo.yifan.net/users/i/d.osthus/norme.htm>. (note reprise à cet auteur)

Comment tu parles ?, que les internautes lancent pour obtenir des réponses sur l'utilisation d'expressions du français ou d'autres langues. Les réponses sont des explications d'emplois lexicaux, grammaticaux, pragmatiques, etc. ;

- d'un autre côté, en glanant sur le forum *ABC de la langue française qui propose des débats sur une collection de thèmes appelés : sens des mots, règles, écriture, réflexions, histoire de la LF, pratiques argotiques et familières, jeux de mots, Internet et informatique, parler pour ne rien dire, le conditionnel dans les récits de presse, origine des expressions, emplois corrects de prépositions, tournures, etc.*

Nous avons choisi de regrouper ici quelques activités métalinguistiques et métadiscursives en deux catégories : celles concernant *le système linguistique et ses normes* (La « métalangue virtuelle », sous 3.), et celles concernant les *formes discursives-textuelles* (« Méta-genres virtuels », sous 4.).

Vu les catégories d'internautes non spécialistes qui y participent, ces constats nous ont obligée à valider l'appartenance de ces activités à une nouvelle forme de *folklinguistique virtuelle* (5), qui s'avère beaucoup plus accessible aux utilisateurs et aux chercheurs que les formes considérées classiques, antérieures à l'ère numérique.

3. Une « métalangue virtuelle » : les normes en débat

Rosier (s.a.) semble être la première à considérer ces internautes « amoureux de la langue » comme catégorie de « linguistes profanes », concédant en même temps qu'il s'agit d'utilisateurs insuffisamment instruits :

il n'est pas rare, et ce n'est qu'un paradoxe apparent, que les internautes tout en avouant leur amour 'maltraitent' (pour reprendre un vocabulaire qui leur est spécifique) la langue: fautes d'orthographe, coquilles, erreurs de syntaxe ne sont pas absentes de ces déclarations d'amour. (p. 4)

Les utilisateurs empruntent différentes formes de discours métalinguistiques, tels, au niveau du lexique, les commentaires et ajustements

sémantiques sur les discours des autres : *précisions par synonymies, explications méta et définitions, stratégies de catégorisation validant ou invalidant une acception, question-réponses plus ou moins élaborées, glossaires improvisés* et même certains *récits (petites biographies linguistiques)* ou des considérations mixtes, très complexes, toutes issues des expériences des utilisateurs avec leur langue.

Ainsi, l'exemple (1) est un cas d'*intervention corrective* sur le sens d'une tournure française (*vouloir aller avec*) jugée mal utilisée:

(1) que je sois sûre de vouloir aller avec==> *tournure à éviter si possible... faut toujours préciser de qui on parle "avec lui" avec le garçon" [...]; sinon ça fais un peu "objet" ^^* (sic !)⁴ (CFJ) (repris à Pop 2017)

Il est évident en (1) que ce mode de rédaction emprunte largement au style de la « cyber-langue » générale (tout en minuscules, abréviations, émoticônes), à l'oral (*faut toujours préciser, ça...*), à la ponctuation de l'écrit (guillemets, points de suspension, point-virgule, tous en emploi approximatif), au discours du professeur ou des guides « parlons correctement », etc. Ce sont des formes composites de textes, une *hybridation de langage normatif avec des styles non formels* – une évidente et permanente particularité de ces nouveaux genres.

À part ces interventions correctives, de vrais *petits dictionnaires virtuels* apparaissent souvent en germe sur Internet, contenant des équivalents inter-linguistiques, des synonymes diastratiques, diatopiques, diachroniques, etc. Comme dans l'exemple (2) ci-dessous :

(2) OMG = OMD (Oh mon dieu !) (Mees vieux !, en québécois) (morbleu ou sapristi en vieux français)

(<http://www.memoclic.com/forum/92787-ca-veut-dire-quoi/>) (repris à Pop 2013)

D'autre part, des *forums de discussion* sur les mots « laids » prennent souvent, sur la Toile, la forme d'un « dictionnaire des mots moches » : *Dicomoché* <http://www.dicomoché.net/>. Certaines remarques y concernent de nouveaux registres de langue, comme le *simglish* en (3) ci-dessous :

⁴ Nous gardons intacte l'orthographe des textes repris sur Internet.

(3) Le simglish n'est pas du français : le simglish est du n'importe quoi. Ce qu'on appelle les faux-amis pour les traductions semblent être une mine d'or pour ceux qui tiennent à faire croire qu'ils sont très à l'aise dans la langue de la puissance dominante. On a vu ainsi l'acteur Gérard Depardieu connaître de sérieux ennuis aux USA pour avoir déclaré en son anglais approximatif avoir prêté assistance à un viol (il avait dit : "i assisted").

<http://www.dicomoché.net/documents/simglish.htm>

Enfin, une catégorie d'internautes s'en prend aux journalistes et en « traque volontiers les écarts linguistiques » (Jacquet & Rosier 2014 : 11), tout en qualifiant leur façon d'écrire de « langue massacrée par la télévision » : lexicque (belgicisms, anglicisms), syntaxe, conjugaison, prépositions, prononciation, genre, orthographe, expressions, typographie, etc. – tout y est, avec une évidente intention normative. Mais ces normes sont souvent « individuelles », donnant la mesure des expériences et des perceptions subjectives de la langue chez les internautes.

Si les activités identifiées ci-dessus concernent le *système linguistique* (la « langue virtuelle » à proprement parler), d'autres sont génératrices de *formes discursives* nouvelles ou de *genres émergents*.

4. « Méta-genres virtuels »

Ainsi, nous avons identifié sur la Toile au moins deux hyper-genres nouveaux: *le Twitter* et *les forums*, ainsi que les genres *commentaires* et *chroniques*.

4.1. Les tweets « méta »

En effet, Paveau (2012) repère *Twitter* comme « genre de discours en cours de stabilisation », mais aussi, de façon plus ponctuelle, le sous-genre des *tweets* « méta », où « l'on commente les formes » ou « on ironise sur les fameux 140 signes ». Tout un système de communication semble y prendre contour, dont certaines formes sont du *type méta-communicatif*.

4.2. *Les forums méta*

Marcoccia (2012), quant à lui, apporte des considérations consistantes sur les *forums de discussion* et sur leurs normes, tout en y identifiant 3 types de commentaires méta : *méta-communicatifs*, *méta-discursifs* et *métalinguistiques*.

On note souvent que, pour les forums de discussion, « il ne faut pas de légitimation pour participer », et c'est « un des traits caractéristiques qui les distinguent des cercles plus clos comme les commissions de terminologie ou bien les associations Loi 1901 ayant pour but la défense du français » (Osthus 2003 : 1). C'est bien cette distinction qui fait la différence entre la linguistique « sérieuse » et la « linguistique populaire ».

Ainsi, le forum *fr.lettres.langue.francaise* devient un vrai « médiateur entre linguistes, fanatiques de défense du français, simple amateurs de langue et/ou usagers du français ». On y voit les internautes recevoir eux-mêmes des questions de terminologie sur le « web » (la Toile), le « webmaster » ou les « sites web » (Osthus 2003). Avec les forums, on peut bien soutenir qu'il s'agit d'un *hyper-genre méta* qui, tout en proposant différents thèmes de débat linguistique, se manifeste sous la forme de plusieurs sous-genres (voir sous 5. ci-dessous).

4.3. *Les commentaires méta*

Le sous-genre *commentaires méta* a émergé facilement parmi d'autres, par le soin de ces « gardiens de la langue », soucieux des dérives linguistiques sur la Toile. Parmi d'autres, Calabrese et Rosier (2015) qualifient de « poreuses » « les frontières entre le discours d'expert et le discours non expert. » (p. 123), permettant « à tout internaute [de] commenter et [de] se présenter lui-même comme un connaisseur. » (p. 133) Tels, par exemple, les lecteurs attentifs et instruits jugeant non seulement les contenus, mais souvent aussi *la manière d'écrire* des journalistes :

(4) USA : une victime de viol se bat pour que le coupable ne puisse pas voir leur enfant [titre]

Commentaire : Je ne sais pas ce qui m'horrifie le plus : le drame vécu par cette mère ou le nombre de fautes contenues dans l'article... (lefigaro.fr 24.9.2013)

4.4. *La chronique linguistique*

Un genre proche et parfois fusionnel du commentaire est considéré par Jacquet et Rosier (2014) ce qu'ils appellent une sorte de « chronique linguistique moderne » : « le commentaire est une des formes possibles de régulation des normes [...] et de renouvellement d'une forme d'interventionnisme linguistique *en interaction*. » (p. 114) Trace incontestable de cet « imaginaire de la langue » constituant *lexiques mentaux* et *grammaires mentales*, issus des expériences personnelles des locuteurs.

5. Vers une « folk-linguistique virtuelle »

Le genre *chronique* ci-dessus invoqué est peut-être un des phénomènes les plus révélateurs d'une *folk-linguistique virtuelle*, une *linguistique théorique en grande mesure*, avec des utilisateurs endossant parfois de vrais rôles de linguistes : *e-lexicologues*, *e-phonéticiens*, *e-grammairiens*, *e-stylisticiens*, *e-pragmaticiens*, etc. Car ces linguistes populaires de l'ère numérique arrivent à produire des genres proches des genres linguistiques « sérieux », et reconnaissables comme tels : *glossaires*, *articles de dictionnaire*, *explications sémantiques*, *étymologiques*, *phonétiques* et *graphiques*, allant jusqu'à de vraies « *petites grammaires* » *normatives* (cf. Pop 2018, 2020).

Nous avons détaché ci-dessous quelques cas de figure de ces nouveaux discours méta : certains proches des dictionnaires « sérieux » (*e-genres lexicographiques*, sous 5.1.), d'autres, proches des grammaires (*e-genres grammaticaux*, sous 5.2).

5.1. *E-genres lexicographiques*

Les textes qui émergent comme *genres lexicographiques* sont des *posts* dont les utilisateurs imitent les structures des vrais glossaires et dictionnaires. Nous avons choisi ci-dessous deux cas de figure les illustrant : un *glossaire-lexique des jeunes* (5.1.1.) et un *article de dictionnaire* (5.1.2.).

5.1.1. Glossaires virtuels : le cas des lexiques des jeunes

Il s'agit de listes de mots plus ou moins élaborées, avec des équivalents inter-linguistiques (à la manière des dictionnaires bilingues) ou avec des synonymes (diastratiques, diatopiques, diachroniques, à la manière des dictionnaires monolingues).

Dans l'exemple (5), le texte, parodiant d'abord les études sur l'argot (c'est *une étude menée dans les cours de récré[ation]s*), propose ensuite une liste de mots/expressions avec leurs gloses, liste considérée provisoire par la *rédac[tion]*, car attendant d'être complétée par les internautes:

(5) Comment tu parles ? Traduction ! Posté le 24/10/2011 par La redac – On en parle

Une étude menée dans les cours de récrés vient de révéler **les nouveaux mots qui sont employés par les "jeunes"**. À toi de nous dire si tu es d'accord avec cette liste de nouvelles expressions branchées, et **si tu sais ce qu'elles signifient ?!**

VOICI LES RÉPONSES !

- Bolos : beauf, coincé, ringard...
 - Fraîcheur : fille qui se prend pour une star (maquillage, mimiques, style...)
 - Le mytho : le menteur
 - J'avoue : oui, c'est vrai, je suis d'accord...
 - Vit'fait : oui, sans plus...
 - Populaire : qui est aimé par plein de gens (sur facebook notamment...)
 - Pécho : verlan de choper on peut être chopé en classe entrain de tricher ou "choper un garçon" c'est à dire l'embrasser).
 - Le seum : avoir la haine, les nerfs...
 - bête : vachement, le must (il a une bête de vélo : il a un vélo mortel !)
 - En mode : en mode fatigué, en mode amoureux... pour dire dans quel état on est.
 - Des barres ! remplaçant de LOL. Se taper des barres, c'est bien rigoler !
- Tu as d'autres mots ou expressions à nous faire partager ? la redac a hâte de connaître *ton langage secret* !

(<http://www.leblogdejulie.com/on-en-parle/comment-tu-parles/>)

Notons l'hybridation du genre linguistique *glossaire* par les particularités participatives, propres au genre des *posts*, générant un type nouveau : les *glossaires ouverts*.

5.1.2. « Articles » de dictionnaires : définitions du sens commun en forme d'échanges

De la même façon, des *définitions* du sens commun élaborées en ligne acquièrent sur la Toile le caractère d'*échange* (questions – réponses) entre les membres d'une discussion. Leur forme explicative contient, pour les mots en débat : *significations*, *utilisations* et *comparaisons* considérées pertinentes, comme en (16) ci-dessous :

(6) Sujet : La signification de "rigoler"

Bonjour,

Je voudrais savoir la signification du verbe "rigoler". Où est-ce qu'on peut utiliser ce mot? Dans quelle situation? Est-ce que vous avez des exemples d'usage que vous pouvez partager avec moi.

Merci beaucoup en avance !

2 Ylou 05-10-2015 12:14:00

Membre

Déconnecté

De : **Grenoble**

Inscrit : **05-03-2015**

Messages : **1 405**

Re : La signification de "rigoler"

Allez-voir ci-dessous :

<http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/rigoler>

3 trevor 05-10-2015 17:20:10

Membre

Déconnecté

De : **Pays de Galles**

Inscrit : **21-06-2010**

Messages : **1 624**

Re : La signification de "rigoler"

Cela n'a rien à voir, mais *rigoler* [rigole] me rappelle toujours le verbe anglais « to wriggle » ['rɪɡəl] (d'origine germanique), trad. générale « se trémousser », c'est pour dire qu'il m'indique toujours un mouvement gigotant du corps. Intéressant, non ? Enfin, pour moi, c'est intéressant.

(<http://www.languefrancaise.net/forum/viewtopic.php?id=2487>)

On observe le caractère complexe et composite de cette élaboration d'amateur, avec :

- une structure dialogale (*cela n'a rien à voir ; Intéressant, non ?*) ;

- des traces subjectives (*me rappelle ; il m'indique ; pour moi c'est intéressant*) ;
- des tournures orales (*c'est pour dire*),

mais aussi la compétence de l'internaute de reproduire une composition rappelant le prototype des articles de dictionnaire (du moins en partie), avec :

- des transcriptions phonétiques pour la prononciation [*rigole*] ;
- des étymologies (même si populaires) : « *to wriggle* » [*'rigal*] (*d'origine germanique*) ;
- une traduction générale – qui peut équivaloir au sens dénotatif, propre ;
- des connotations ou sèmes secondaires (*il m'indique toujours un mouvement gigotant du corps*).

Un tel mix de styles se fait évident aussi dans l'exemple (7), qui, tout en gardant une structure en question-réponse et des marques de subjectivité, essaie d'endosser une structure de *glossaire* :

(7) *Svp, ca veux dire quoi ptdr ? merci?*
ca m'agace de pas savoir alors une petite réponse svp
merci

coucou toi
pété de rire
mdr = mort de rire
lol = je m'éclate intérieurement

(<http://www.memoclic.com/forum/92787-ca-veut-dire-quoi/>)

On y remarque une particularité dialogale supplémentaire :

- d'abord, pour la *question*, le souci de clore l'intervention comme « unité » complète, contenant un acte principal (la question), un acte subordonné (la justification), une reformulation de la requête et un acte de remerciement ;
- pour la *réponse*, son ouverture par un acte rituel de salutation (*coucou toi*), avant la brève élaboration du glossaire en structures d'équivalences (*mdr = mort de rire*, etc.). Le résultat est un *échange complet*, formé de

deux constructions à ouverture (et clôture) obligatoire(s), signalant à chaque fois le nouvel intervenant.

5.1.3. Discours lexicologique plus ou moins pro

L'exemple (8) est un commentaire sur le sémantisme du mot *modérateur*, mal connu d'un utilisateur. Intéressé par l'origine de ce mot en français, il consulte les dictionnaires de référence, donne son opinion sur le bon choix du mot, en propose d'autres à sa place, et ouvre ensuite un débat sur ce mot considéré récent :

(8) yd 17-12-2014 13:14:37 Dernière modification par yd (17-12-2014 13:18:33)

Membre

Déconnecté

Inscrit : **04-02-2011**

Messages : **2 623**

Sujet : ***D'où avons-nous sorti ou ressorti « modérateur » ?***

Bonjour.

J'ai découvert le substantif modérateur en arrivant sur Internet, et jusqu'alors je ne l'avais jamais rencontré. La page du TLFi me laisse sur ma faim, se référant à un ancien usage (1416) qui me paraît avoir été complètement oublié en français jusqu'à l'époque Internet, à l'exception de l'usage dans des Églises protestantes au Canada francophone.

C'est en apprenant cet usage dans une Église protestantes du Canada que j'en suis venu à m'interroger sur l'usage de ce mot sur nos forums ; jusqu'ici j'avais adopté le mot avec quelques réticences, mais sans approfondir.

J'aurais bien mieux compris *régulateur*, ou mieux, *arbitre*, ou *juge arbitre*, que *modérateur*, qui me fait penser à une mise en conformité avec des normes plus ou moins auto-proclamées et à géométrie variable.

Je ne sais si des discussions ont déjà eu lieu ; si nécessaire je ferai des recherches, mais je voulais surtout connaître le sentiment de chacun.

(<http://www.languefrancaise.net/forum/viewtopic.php?id=2487>)

L'ensemble de ce texte est un exemple intéressant d'implication dans la problématique des néologismes et des choix terminologiques d'une langue par un locuteur se situant à mi-chemin entre les profanes et les professionnels du lexique.

5.2. *Commentaires phonétiques et standardisation*

Dans l'exemple (9), un membre du groupe lance une question sur la prononciation d'une expression en verlan, pour laquelle il formule lui-même des règles phonétiques. Les associations qui lui viennent à l'esprit, considérées des contre-exemples, l'oblige à demander l'avis d'autres utilisateurs :

(9) **András 06-05-2015 09:48:07**

Membre

Déconnecté

Inscrit : **08-05-2013**

Messages : **14**

Sujet : Le e "ducca"

Bonjour à vous,

Pour dire "c'est louche" en verlan j'opte pour deux sortes de prononciation : c'est chelou et c'est ch'lou. Quant à ce dernier, je pense que c'est correct aussi puisqu'il s'agit de la chute facultative de e muet. Comme par exemple maintenant ou maint'nant.

Étant donné que c'est un mot verlan j'ai des doutes quand même parce qu'on a besoin de tous les éléments (syllabes) des mots pour être compris...

D'avance merci de vos éclaircissements.

(<http://www.languefrancaise.net/forum/viewtopic.php?id=2487>)

Est ici évident l'état d'insécurité linguistique, si courant parmi les profanes, mais l'exemple rappelle aussi les *débats de type standardisation* pour les formes moins stabilisées.

5.3. *E-genres grammaticaux ou « petites grammaires »*

Plusieurs textes reflètent des connaissances et des sentiments plus ou moins hésitants quant aux structures grammaticales chez des individus qui se posent des questions ou qui y répondent dans l'espace virtuel. Nous avons choisi comme exemples (10 et 11) ce qu'on pourrait prendre pour des « petites grammaires » pratiques, ressemblant aux *rubriques* « *Dites / Ne dites pas...* ».

(10) ***Sujet : C'est ou ce sont ?***

Bonjour,

en général, on dit "Ce sont" lorsque l'énumération qui suit commence par un nom au pluriel. "C'est" lorsque cette énumération commence par un

singulier. Mais lorsque la phrase débute par un nom singulier, je m'interroge et je trouve pluriel choquant.

Exemple :

M. Dugenou, ce sont trois victoires en grand prix, deux podium en championnats et deux sélections en équipe de France.

J'écrirais plutôt "M. Dugenou, c'est trois victoires, deux podiums, ...". considérant que "c'est" s'accorde davantage avec M. Dugenou qu'avec l'énumération de son palmarès.

Qu'en pensez-vous ? Existe-t-il une règle précise lorsque "c'est" est précédé d'un nom singulier ?

Merci

(<http://www.languefrancaise.net/forum/viewtopic.php?id=2487>)

Ces textes peuvent être pris pour des manifestations individuelles de *systèmes linguistiques mentaux*. Il semble en être ainsi de la norme d'emploi élaborée en (10) sous forme de petite « grammaire mentale » : **des règles de grammaire suivies d'exemples. L'amateurisme se trahit par la mauvaise connaissance du sujet, et la subjectivité par les nombreuses marques personnelles (je m'interroge ; je trouve ; j'écrirais plutôt ; considérant que...).**

(11) Thomas111 15-11-2015 13:01:10

Membre

Déconnecté

Inscrit : **19-11-2014**

Messages : **47**

Sujet : se voir à/chez Charlie

Quelle préposition est-ce que je devrais utiliser dans la phrase suivante:

Est-ce qu'on pourrait se voir à / chez Charlie ?

Les deux prépositions soulignées m'étaient venues à l'esprit mais, peut-être, il en faut encore une autre. «Charlie» est le nom d'un café (établissement) où on peut boire un boisson sans alcool, manger du gâteau, lire un journal ou bavarder avec les amis. Je veux utiliser la phrase dans un SMS.

Merci, T

Abel Boyer 15-11-2015 18:34:58

Membre

Déconnecté

Inscrit : **19-11-2011**

Messages : **3 810**

Re : se voir à/chez Charlie

Comme Charlie est un prénom, “chez” me paraît plus naturel, mais “à” serait sûrement possible.

Rendez-vous chez Lipp, chez Bébert, chez Tante Yvonne.

Rendez-vous à la Brasserie des Amis, aux Deux Magots, au café de Flore.

(<http://www.languefrancaise.net/forum/viewtopic.php?id=2487>)

Le doute avoué en (11) annule la validité de la règle initialement formulée, et lance le débat par une question adressée aux éventuels utilisateurs plus avisés. On y voit se formuler des règles mentales (m'étaient venues à l'esprit), approximatives, et l'instabilité linguistique des utilisateurs (leur vrai tourment par rapport à une norme, et ce, même pour écrire un sms !). La réponse attendue n'est pas plus claire non plus, laissant la vraie grammaire en suspens.

Soulignons que ce qui intéresse ici n'est pas tant l'aspect de la bonne connaissance de ces règles, mais la façon dont ces « p'tit profs » que sont ces « donneurs de règles » formulent leurs textes en imitant les vrais genres linguistiques – dictionnaires ou grammaires. Bref, on peut considérer que l'Internet offre actuellement une source inépuisable pour de nouvelles recherches en linguistique populaire par ces formes génériques « vulgaires » issues de discours « sérieux ».

6. Conclusion

Nous avons illustré le fait que la Toile s'avère être une terre fertile pour la naissance de nouveaux « genres populaires » – *folk-genres numériques à caractère métalinguistique*. On a pu identifier et énumérer plusieurs *méta-genres* électroniques ayant, par leur caractère improvisé (cf. aussi la revue *Pratiques* nos 139-140), un très intéressant « gradient de scientificité » non encore suffisamment décrit.

L'hypothèse qui semble aussi se confirmer est *que ces textes reflètent, chez les utilisateurs, d'un côté, leurs représentations mentales sur la langue – matière riche et intéressante pour la problématique des imaginaires linguistiques en linguistique cognitive –, mais en même temps des représentations mentales de genres méta que ces non linguistes ont acquis pendant leur expérience d'apprentissage des langues.*

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Forumurile de discuții profesionale. Construirea identităților discursive

CRISTINA VARGA

Rezumat. Prezentul capitol are ca scop analizarea modului de construire a identităților discursive care participă la interacțiunile comunicative în cadrul uneia dintre cele mai vechi forme de comunicare mediată de calculator, *forumurile de discuții*. Descrise ca *situații de comunicare* și analizate din perspectiva modelului social comunicativ al discursului propus de Patrick Charaudeau (1984-2007), interacțiunile comunicative din cadrul forumurilor de discuție profesionale se construiesc ca *discursuri ale ignoranței* și ale *cunoașterii* în care sunt implicate identități construite discursiv în parametri determinați lingvistic, cultural și temporal. Exemplele comentate pe care le-am ales pentru ilustrarea identităților construite de către diferiți locutori, în limba română, sunt ilustrative pentru felul în care este exprimată cunoașterea și ignoranța, într-un mediu virtual în care comunicarea specializată este esențială.

Cuvinte-cheie: *forum de discuții specializat/profesional, identitate discursivă, discurs electronic, transmiterea cunoașterii online, interacțiune comunicativă, discurs al ignoranței.*

Primele comunități virtuale și tipologia acestora

Internetul s-a constituit încă de la începuturile sale ca un spațiu discursiv eterogen, în care numeroase genuri discursive au apărut, s-au dezvoltat și s-au diversificat într-un ritm foarte rapid, impulsionate de evoluția tehnologică și de popularitatea comunicării virtuale în rândurile utilizatorilor. Chiar dacă în prezent în comunicarea virtuală sunt mult mai

populare *rețelele sociale*, *comunicarea sincronică* și cea *multimodală*, celelalte forme de comunicare, *sincronice* sau *asincronice*, nu au dispărut. Ele continuă să existe, să evolueze și să fie folosite de către utilizatorii Internetului chiar dacă nu mai au popularitatea din trecut. Acestea ajung să fie specifice unui *mediu virtual* anume sau unui anumit *gen discursiv electronic*. Așa cum se poate observa, Internetul păstrează vii toate genurile discursive create succesiv încă de la începuturile sale. În prezent, toate aceste genuri ale discursului electronic¹ se regăsesc în Internet și, după ce s-au bucurat de o anumită perioadă de maximă popularitate, au devenit specifice unui anumit domeniu specializat sau unei anumite forme de comunicare virtuală.

Dintre acestea, *forumurile de discuții* constituie una dintre cele mai vechi forme de comunicare în spațiul virtual, unul dintre primele genuri discursive reprezentative ale comunităților virtuale. Având la bază forme de comunicare anterioare precum *BBS (buletin board system)*, sisteme de comunicare online specializate pe diverse domenii profesionale, foarte populare încă de la crearea lor în 1978 de către Ward Christensen și Randy Seuss (Sager, 1983, p. 214), *forumurile de discuții* se caracterizează prin aceeași organizare tematică a comunicării online orientată înspre domeniile profesionale. În prezent, datorită evoluției Internetului și a creșterii continue a numărului de utilizatori, diversitatea tematică a forumurilor este mult mai mare.

Astfel, consultarea uneia dintre cele mai vechi comunități virtuale, inițiate în 1985 și a cărei activitate continuă și astăzi precum *the WELL*² (Rheinghold, 2000, pp. 1-24), ne permite să observăm o structură formată din 12 categorii diferite de *forumuri internet* organizate în 173 de teme. În afară de domeniile științifice și tehnice, domeniile predilecte ale forumurilor de discuții încă de la începutul anilor '80, se pot observa și teme de discuție orientate spre alte activități precum *petrecerea timpului liber*, *știri*, *dezvoltare personală* etc. În ciuda acestei diversificări, temele profesionale, domeniile

¹ Pentru tipologia discursului și definiția conceptului de discurs electronic la care facem referire în acest capitol a se vedea Varga (2011, 12-15).

² Comunitatea virtuală WELL poate fi accesată la URL: <https://www.well.com/> (data ultimei accesări: 6.03.2021).

specializate, predarea/învățarea online ocupă încă un rol important în interacțiunea discursivă din aceste spații virtuale.

Descris în bibliografia de specialitate ca un tip de comunicare online ce aparține primei generații de sisteme de *comunicare mediată de calculator*, asincronică și bazată pe text (Chun: 2008, p. 18), *forumul de discuții* prezintă aceleași caracteristici discursive ce se regăsesc în comunicarea de pe rețelele sociale moderne. Chiar dacă, în comparație cu acestea *forumul de discuții*, ca sistem de comunicare bazat pe text, poate părea o modalitate de comunicare mai simplă, studiat în profunzime acesta se revelă a fi o *interacțiune comunicativă* complexă și variată.

Tipologia forumurilor de discuție este, la rândul ei, destul de bogată, acestea fiind clasificate în funcție de mai multe criterii. Dintre clasificările existente în bibliografia de specialitate ne-am oprit asupra celei propuse de Porter (2006), conform căreia, în cadrul forumurilor de discuții, se pot distinge două categorii principale: *forumuri de discuții inițiate de utilizatori* și *forumuri de discuții sponsorizate*. La rândul ei, fiecare categorie poate fi clasificată în funcție de tipul de relație ce se stabilește între membrii acesteia. Astfel, pentru prima categorie de forumuri, este vorba despre *relații sociale* și *relații profesionale*, iar pentru cea de-a doua categorie, despre *relații comerciale*, *relații non-profit* și *relații politice/guvernamentale*, conform schemei de mai jos:

Forumuri de discuții:

a) Inițiate de utilizatori:

- 1. Relații sociale;*
- 2. Relații profesionale.*

b) Sponsorizate:

- 1. Relații comerciale;*
- 2. Relații non-profit;*
- 3. Relații politice/guvernamentale.*

Fiecare dintre aceste categorii poate cuprinde o mare varietate de *forumuri de discuții*. În acest studiu, ne vom referi la acele forumuri de discuții care se bazează pe *relații profesionale*. Este vorba despre *forumuri de discuții* care, din punct de vedere tematic favorizează temele de dezbatere din diferite domenii specializate și profesionale, scopul comunicării online fiind

acela de a schimba idei și informații, de a învăța lucruri noi sau de a transmite cunoaștere într-un domeniu specializat. Aceste *finalități discursive* fac ca un anumit tip de *interlocutori* să se implice și să *interacționeze comunicativ* într-un anumit tip de *situație de comunicare*, în care ceilalți membri ai forumului de discuție neimplicați direct în schimbul de replici formează *audiența*.

Forumurile de discuții sunt, în marea lor majoritate, orientate tematic înspre domenii profesionale sau de specialitate. Ca exemplu menționăm *COVID-19 Discussion Forum*, creat de *Washington State Medical Association*³, forumul sponsorizat al unei asociații profesionale, care, în contextul crizei medicale din 2020-2021 a deschis un spațiu oficial de dezbatere publică în domeniul Covid-19. Pentru a garanta o comunicare profesională într-un domeniu de specialitate utilizatorii trebuie să se autentifice, să-și declare statutul profesional, dacă sunt sau nu *cadre medicale*. Această distincție între *profesioniști* și *non-profesioniști* nu este o practică obișnuită în forumurile de discuții, dar este complet justificată pentru evitarea conceptelor emergente în spațiul virtual precum *fake news* și *fake science*.

În România, *forumurile de discuții profesionale* au pierdut progresiv teren în ultimul deceniu în fața rețelelor sociale și a comunicării multimedia în timp real. Astfel, dacă în urmă cu un deceniu existau sute de *forumuri de discuții profesionale*, în prezent, am putut verifica faptul că doar 6 *forumuri de discuție*⁴ sunt încă active, dintre care cele mai importante sunt forumuri profesionale.

Situația de comunicare. Cadru teoretic

Forumurile de discuție pot fi analizate discursiv din mai multe perspective teoretice. Cea adoptată de noi pune în prim plan analiza discursului ca *limbaj în uz*, cadru teoretic completat de studii aparținând *școlii*

³ Forumul este accesibil la URL: https://wsma.org/WSMA/Membership/Discussion_Forum/COVID_19_Forum.aspx (data ultimei consultări: 07.03.2021).

⁴ Lista forumurilor profesionale românești active în februarie 2021 este următoarea: <https://usp.ro/forum/>, <http://romania-inedit.3xforum.ro/>, <http://forum.ubuntu.ro/>, <http://www.eva.ro/forum/>, <https://www.roportal.ro/discutii/>, <https://forum.softpedia.com/>. Dintre acestea, cel mai important și mai activ forum pare a fi forumul *Softpedia*.

franceze de analiză a discursului, respectiv, modelul social-comunicativ al discursului propus de Patrick Charaudeau (1992), modelul conversațional al discursului (Orecchioni, 1996) și analiza interacțiunilor comunicative, respectiv *conversația* (Traverso, 2004).

Astfel, în contextul general al actului de comunicare discursul este perceput ca fiind un *dispozitiv* ce are în centru *locutorul*, cel care inițiază discursul ca o relație comunicativă cu un *interlocutor*:

Il faut se représenter l'acte de communication comme un dispositif au cœur duquel se trouve le sujet parlant (le locuteur, qu'il parle ou écrive), en relation avec un autre partenaire (l'interlocuteur). (Charaudeau, 1992, p. 634)

Actul comunicativ este descris de același autor ca fiind format din mai multe componente discursive: *situația de comunicare, modul de organizare discursivă, limba și textul*. *Situația de comunicare* este un concept central al teoriei discursului din perspectiva lui Charaudeau și este percepută ca o *punere în scenă* în care participanții interacționează comunicativ și ajung să stabilească o legătură bazată pe intercomprehensiune. Sensul care decurge din interacțiunea comunicativă este, în parte, rezultatul condițiilor generale și al limitărilor în care are loc actul comunicativ.

Conform autorului⁵, pentru a determina specificul unei *situații de comunicare* trebuie avute în vedere următoarele aspecte: *scopul comunicării, participanții la situația de comunicare, subiectul comunicării și condițiile exterioare ale comunicării*. Acești parametri ai actului comunicativ configurează *dispozitivul enunțiativ*, la rândul său constituit din: *finalitatea actelor de vorbire, identitățile implicate în actul de comunicare, tema interacțiunii verbale și cadrul fizic* în care se desfășoară situația de comunicare.

Contractul de comunicare, așa cum a fost descris de Patrick Charaudeau, se stabilește între participanții la interacțiunea comunicativă și este determinat de *constrângeri situaționale* și *constrângeri discursive*. Aceste două dimensiuni ale contractului de comunicare sunt percepute ca fiind

⁵ Teoria discursivă a lui Patrick Charaudeau s-a constituit de-a lungul unei perioade lungi de timp, aceasta evoluând treptat și devenind din ce în ce mai complexă. În acest studiu, vom înțelege prin termenul de *teoria discursului* în perspectiva lui Patrick Charaudeau lucrările elaborate de acesta în perioada cuprinsă între 1984 și 2007.

spațiul discursiv extern, respectiv *constrângerile situaționale*, în timp ce *constrângerile discursive* sunt percepute ca formând *spațiul discursiv intern*. Cele două spații discursive sunt interdependente, constrângerile situaționale determinând producția discursivă a locutorului prin intermediul constrângerilor discursive.

Astfel, comunicarea este reprezentată ca un spațiu discursiv dublu articulat:

[...] *Un espacio externo, lugar de la construcción de las identidades psicosociales de los sujetos, de su finalidad de influencia y de las circunstancias materiales de la comunicación; un espacio interno, lugar de la construcción de las identidades discursivas de los sujetos y de la finalidad enunciativa a través de la puesta en escena lingüística, que resulta, por una parte de las instrucciones dadas por la situación de comunicación y por la otra, de los proyecto de habla específicos de los sujetos interlocutores.* (Charaudeau, 2006, p. 43)

Astfel, conform autorului, discursul este rezultatul unui set de constrângeri și se manifestă prin intermediul strategiilor discursive folosite de interlocutori. Aceste strategii discursive constituie un element central al analizei discursului.

Genul discursiv, conform acestei teorii, este determinat de trei parametri: *identitățile discursive*, *obiectivele interacțiunii verbale* și *dispozitivul comunicativ*. Aceste trei elemente sunt strâns legate de ritualurile sociale de comunicare și, prin urmare, de genurile discursive:

La communication est un phénomène général de la société humaine qui englobe divers types et genres de discours, toujours dans une intentionnalité d'intercompréhension et d'influence. (Charaudeau, 2007, p. 5)

Fiecare dintre aceste elemente se constituie ca parametru de analiză al unui anumit tip de discurs. Astfel, în spațiul discursiv interior al contractului de comunicare, locutorul își construiește propria *identitate discursivă*. Această identitate este construită doar prin ceea ce spune locutorul despre el direct sau indirect. Altfel spus, discursul locutorului se structurează în funcție de identitatea acestuia, de imaginea pe care o are el despre interlocutor și de felul în care se raportează la ceea ce s-a spus deja:

[...] *on parle (ou écrit) en organisant son discours en fonction de sa propre identité, de l'image que l'on a de son interlocuteur, et de ce qui a été déjà dit.* (Charaudeau, 1992, p. 643)

În funcție de situația de comunicare pe care o inițiază, locutorul va construi o imagine a *sinelui discursiv*, o imagine pe care o asumă în interacțiunea comunicativă și care se poate modifica dacă, pe parcursul dialogului, parametrii comunicării se schimbă. În afară de *sinele discursiv*, locutorul construiește prin intermediul actului comunicativ și alte identități, precum *colocutorul* și *publicul*. Identitatea discursivă a *colocutorului* nu are legătură cu identitatea psiho-socială a acestuia. În cadrul interacțiunii comunicative, atunci când *locutorul* încearcă să stabilească un contract comunicațional în discursul său, acesta atribuie un „rol” partenerului său de discuție. Identitatea atribuită *colocutorului* indică clar ce tip de raport comunicațional dorește să stabilească *locutorul*.

În funcție de identitățile construite discursiv de către inițiatorul contractului de comunicare se pot stabili mai multe raporturi comunicative, precum: *raporturi de asociere, de autoritate, de incluziune, de excluziune, de indulgență și de obiecție*. În funcție de raportul dintre cele două identități implicate în actul comunicativ se poate observa care dintre acestea este mai puternică și ce rol are în contractul de comunicare. Prin urmare, dacă cineva dorește să ceară o opinie, să obțină o informație sau să exprime o emoție, va asuma diferite identități discursive și se va raporta diferit la identitatea discursivă a *colocutorului*. De asemenea, raportul dintre cele două identități implicate în interacțiunea comunicativă va fi diferit, în funcție de parametrii contractului de comunicare.

De exemplu, în cazul în care cineva dorește să învețe ceva nou în mediul online informal, va trebui să acceseze comunitățile virtuale de profil, unde poate obține informația specializată de care are nevoie. Pentru aceasta, *locutorul* va trebui să asume o anumită identitate discursivă și să ceară fie *ajutorul*, fie *asistența*, fie *informația* necesară unui *colocutor*, o identitate discursivă care poate corespunde unei persoane sau unui grup. Raportul care se stabilește implicit între *protagoniștii* situației de comunicare este specific unui contract comunicativ în care o identitate puternică, cea a

expertului deținător al informației, este solicitată de o altă identitate discursivă, un novice, să intervină comunicativ pentru realizarea unui raport de transfer discursiv al cunoașterii.

Obiectivele interacțiunii comunicative reprezintă motivația stabilirii unui contract de comunicare. În absența unui obiectiv aceasta nu are loc. În cadrul actului de comunicare, locutorul trebuie să își asume o identitate care să îl îndreptățească să inițieze o interacțiune comunicativă. *Intenționalitatea* mesajului acestuia trebuie să fie adecvată, în caz contrar, dacă locutorul nu își adaptează identitatea și discursul la situația de comunicare, *colocutorul* nu se va implica în interacțiunea comunicativă. Pentru ca un contract comunicativ să poată fi stabilit, *colocutorul* trebuie să poată interpreta corect și să înțeleagă intenția comunicativă a *locutorului*.

Din acest motiv, protagoniștii implicați într-o situație de comunicare trebuie să aibă competențele comunicative necesare pentru a exprima, respectiv înțelege corect intenția comunicativă a celui care inițiază dialogul. De asemenea, locutorul trebuie să aibă capacitatea de a construi secvența discursivă de inițiere a interacțiunii comunicative în așa fel încât aceasta să ilustreze corect intenția sa de comunicare. Astfel, nu odată, doi protagoniști cu competențe comunicative diferite ar putea interpreta diferit intenția comunicativă a mesajului locutorului. În cazul în care se creează o asemenea situație, cei doi protagoniști vor apela la mecanisme discursive de clarificare a intenției comunicative pentru a putea stabili de comun acord finalitatea inițială a comunicării.

Patrick Charaudeau teoretizează și conceptul de *dispozitiv discursiv*, pe care îl descrie ca fiind manifestarea materială a producției discursive a participanților la o situație de comunicare ce depinde de diverși parametri. În primul rând, pentru *dispozitivul discursiv* sunt importante circumstanțele comunicării, respectiv dacă interacțiunea dintre protagoniști este o situație curentă sau nu, dacă este o situație de comunicare permisă sau nu, dacă situația de comunicare este extraordinară sau nu. De asemenea, forma comunicării, *scrisă*, *orală* sau *multimodală*, este și ea importantă. Dispoziția protagoniștilor în cadrul situației comunicative este esențială. Astfel, dacă protagoniștii împart un spațiu *personal*, *familiar* sau *public*, dacă există *contact*

direct între aceștia sau dacă există *contact vizual*. De asemenea, este important de știut dacă interacțiunea discursivă a protagoniștilor se realizează în *spațiul fizic* sau în *spațiul virtual*.

Diferite circumstanțe ale situației de comunicare determină schimbări în discursul verbal:

[...] *telle ou telle combinaison sur le comportement langagier des interlocuteurs, et dans sur l'organisation de la configuration verbale.* (Charaudeau, 1992, p. 639)

Astfel, autorul operează o distincție între *situațiile de comunicare monolocutive*, cele în care protagoniștii situației de comunicare nu împart același spațiu fizic pe durata comunicării, și *situațiile de comunicare interlocutive*, în care participanții la discuție sunt prezenți în același spațiu fizic.

Forumul de discuții profesional. Situație de comunicare

Importanța și dimensiunea comunicativă a *forumurilor de discuție profesionale*, un gen discursiv mai puțin popular în prezent decât în trecut, poate fi argumentată cu date cantitative actuale. Astfel, o căutare a unei sintagme precum „computer forum”⁶ cu un motor de căutare ca *Google Search* afișează în prezent un număr de 1.070.000 de rezultate la nivel mondial, indiferent de limba de comunicare⁷. Unele dintre acestea ar putea avea o anvergură limitată, deși există forumuri profesionale extrem de longevive, precum *the WELL*, ce are o activitate continuă de peste 35 de ani. Un alt forum web profesional precum *Softpedia* (<https://forum.softpedia.com/>), un forum românesc, are o activitate neîntreruptă de 21 de ani, un număr de

⁶ Căutarea realizată cu ajutorul operatorului de căutare în sintagmă „computer forum” a fost realizată în data de 21.03.2021 și a avut ca scop afișarea unor rezultate exacte pentru forumurile de discuții profesionale. Prin utilizarea acestui operator de căutare s-a evitat afișarea unor rezultate fals-pozitive. Astfel, o căutare simplă pentru cuvântul-cheie *forum* ar fi afișat rezultate precum: *web forum*, *internet forum*, *discussion forum*, *online forum*, *virtual forum* etc. fără a oferi garanția că este vorba despre forumuri profesionale orientate înspre un anumit domeniu specializat.

⁷ De asemenea, trebuie avut în vedere faptul că forumurile pot rămâne accesibile online chiar dacă sunt inactive de mai mulți ani.

77 forumuri, structurate în 9 categorii, înregistrând în urma interacțiunii comunicative a utilizatorilor un număr de 26.514.772 de postări din partea a 818.464 de membri, dintre care 3.940 erau conectați online în momentul consultării noastre. Aceste date reprezintă argumente suficiente pentru a ilustra faptul că *forumul de discuții* își îndeplinește eficient rolul în transmiterea de cunoaștere în spațiul virtual, în ciuda faptului că nu este vorba despre un gen discursiv popular.

Analizat punct de vedere discursiv, în termenii teoriei lui Patrick Charaudeau, *forumul web profesional* se descrie ca *situație de comunicare monolocutivă*, interlocutorii nefiind prezenți în același *spațiu fizic* pe durata interacțiunii comunicative care este bazată pe text. În prezent, datorită evoluției tehnologice, este neobișnuit ca în dispozitivul de comunicare să fie primordial *textul scris*. Acesta poate fi simplu, însă, de multe ori este însoțit de *elemente grafice* (emoticoane), *de ilustrații* (imagini, grafice, capturi de ecran) sau chiar de *elemente multimodale* (videoclipuri). În ceea ce privește nivelul *non-verbal al comunicării* (reacții, mimică, gestică, intonație, debit, volum etc.), interlocutorii nu pot percepe în textul scris *componentele paraverbale și superverbale* ale mesajului. Emoțiile care acompaniază comunicarea în forumurile web profesionale sunt marcate cu ajutorul emoticoanelor, trebuie însă ținut cont de faptul că acestea sunt utilizate și interpretate cultural. Prin urmare, în cazul situațiilor de comunicare monolocutive, *protagoniștii* sunt condiționați de cadrul cultural propriu atunci când interpretează reacțiile partenerilor de discuție. Un avantaj îl reprezintă faptul că *forumul de discuții profesional* este o comunicare asincronică. Prin urmare, interacțiunea comunicativă nu impune interpretarea instantanee a reacțiilor participanților la situația de comunicare, discursul se poate structura, se poate modifica, iar elementele considerate ambigue se pot clarifica.

În ceea ce privește tipurile de *contracte de comunicare* care se stabilesc între participanții la interacțiunile comunicative din forumurile de discuții, trebuie menționat că încă de la începuturile sale, forumul de discuții a avut ca principal scop *schimbul de informații și experiențe, aflarea de noutăți și învățarea* în cadrul unui domeniu profesional specializat. Chiar dacă astăzi

se pot accesa forumuri de discuții din cele mai diverse domenii, principala motivație discursivă continuă să fie *transferul de cunoaștere* între utilizatori. Se poate vorbi, prin urmare, despre o *comunitate de cunoaștere* în care toți membrii tind să fie la curent cu ultimele informații, să învețe și să își amelioreze competențele într-un domeniu specific.

Trebuie remarcat că utilitatea unei comunități de cunoaștere în care utilizatorii se ajută între ei, învață unii de la alții și își adresează întrebări unii altora cu scopul de *a ști* nu a scăpat neobservată didacticii și circuitului de predare/învățare formal și instituționalizat. Astfel, odată cu dezvoltarea procesului de predare/învățare în mediile online (*eLearning, vLearning, mLearning, lifelong learning, online learning management, online knowledge management* etc.), aproape toate platformele didactice au implementat *forumuri de discuție* pentru activitățile lor practice și pentru temele de casă. Prin urmare, asistăm la un fenomen neobișnuit, în care un gen discursiv orientat, la începuturile sale, strict spre o *cunoaștere specializată informală*, este apropiat de *didactica formală* ca una dintre metodele sale de lucru în mediul online. Bineînțeles, *discursul electronic* ce se construiește în mediul de didactic formal este diferit de cel din forumurile profesionale deoarece și *dispozitivul discursiv* este diferit.

Unul dintre aspectele esențiale ale situației de comunicare din forumurile de discuție profesionale îl reprezintă *identitățile discursive* implicate în actul comunicativ. Astfel, într-un forum al unei clase virtuale de liceu *identitățile discursive* implicate sunt cele tipice procesului didactic formal (*director, profesor, psiholog, elev, părinte*), fiecare dintre participanții la interacțiunea comunicativă asumând un discurs similar rolului ce îi corespunde în viața reală (dar nu identic!). În cazul identităților care participă la interacțiunea comunicativă în *forumurile de discuție profesionale* situația este puțin diferită. Identitățile asumate în cadrul acestora sunt diferite de cele menționate în forumurile didactice și constă într-un binom *cunoscător-novice*, în care, de obicei, *novicele*, din cauza competențelor sale limitate într-un anumit domeniu, contactează comunitatea online activă pe forumul dedicat unui anumit domeniu profesional pentru a obține *un anumit tip de cunoaștere*, precizat în *mesajul de deschidere* care inițiază *dialogul cunoașterii* în spațiul virtual.

Interacțiunea discursivă inițiată de utilizatorul *novice* poate avea diferite scopuri comunicative din sfera *transmiterii de cunoaștere*, precum: *obținerea de cunoaștere, obținerea de ajutor/asistență, obținerea unei opinii/feedback, completarea unei cunoașteri parțiale, dezbaterăa unor teme specializate, obținerea explicației unui fenomen/proces*. Toate aceste finalități presupun construirea unui anumit tip de discurs prin care se realizează *transferul de cunoaștere* între locutori și care îi obligă pe aceștia să își asume o anumită identitate discursivă.

De exemplu, în mesajul de deschidere a unui „thread” într-un forum de discuții despre calculatoare intenția comunicativă este enunțată în felul următor: *hello guys, i need yall help, please help me / i have old pc [...] THANKS GUYS / ,can yall help me to fix this issue please*. Se poate observa din structurarea discursului că locutorul solicită ajutorul pentru a repara o defecțiune. Modul de adresare este informal, raportarea la interlocutori se face în termeni familiari – „guys” –, dar inițiatorul actului locutiv adaugă mărci de politețe „please” / „thanks” pentru a putea stabili un contract comunicativ și a obține ajutorul necesar. De remarcat ortografia informală – scrierea cu majuscule, utilizarea aleatorie a semnelor de punctuație, tipice discursului din mediile virtuale – precum și emfaza asupra cuvântului „help”, repetat de trei ori, indicii ale unei scrieri subiective, menite să transmită receptorilor mesajului starea de spirit a inițiatorului dialogului și să îi facă să se implice în comunicare pentru a-l ajuta.

Forumul de discuții profesional. Identități discursive

Identitățile discursive asumate în cadrul unui forum de discuții profesional⁸ sunt determinate și modelate de finalitatea comunicativă a

⁸ Pentru a exemplifica identitățile discursive am ales exemple în limba română de pe forumul *Softpedia* (<https://forum.softpedia.com/>), unul dintre cele mai active forumuri românești, cu o activitate neîntreruptă în perioada 2001-2021. Exemplele au fost toate publicate în 2021, ceea ce garantează actualitatea tiparelor comunicative analizate. Datele de autentificare ale utilizatorilor, thread-ul și data publicării nu vor fi publicate în acest studiu, ele fiind înregistrate de către autorul studiului împreună cu alte materiale de lucru utilizate pentru documentarea analizei comunicării în spațiul virtual.

inițiatorului interacțiunii comunicative. Astfel, odată ce o persoană asumă faptul că îi lipsesc cunoștințe de care are nevoie într-un domeniu specializat, va construi discursiv în forumurile de discuții o anumită identitate prin care să exprime situația în care se află. Locutorul poate recunoaște că *nu știe*, poate insista asupra unei *situații grave* care îl obligă să caute informația, poate să invoce *circumstanțe neașteptate* sau să afirme că are *o problemă de rezolvat*. Identitatea pe care acesta este obligat să o asume este fie una în care asumă deschis *ignoranța*, o atenuază discursiv sau o disimulează. De exemplu, locutorul poate construi un discurs de tipul „*știu dar problema mă depășește*”, prin care nu admite ignoranța, ci doar faptul că nivelul său de cunoaștere nu este suficient de specializat pentru a-i permite să rezolve problema. Aceasta este o strategie prin care locutorul spune de fapt că nu știe să rezolve problema cu care se confruntă, însă nu admite ignoranța în ceea ce îl privește. Folosind astfel de strategii discursive, locutorii construiesc în felul lor diferite *discursuri ale ignoranței*, unele directe, altele indirecte, toate însă menționând o carență cognitivă.

În calitate de inițiator al unui discurs al ignoranței, locutorul va propune un *contract comunicativ* membrilor unei *comunități virtuale de cunoaștere* (forumul) pentru a obține cunoașterea dorită. Pentru aceasta, prin modul în care inițiază discuția și prin felul în care evoluează progresia tematică a interacțiunii comunicative, locutorul își construiește o anumită identitate marcată discursiv și cultural. Această identitate este revelată de modul în care locutorul își construiește discursul și de felul în care se referă la el.

Este important de remarcat faptul că prin discursul ignoranței inițiat, locutorul nu construiește doar *identitatea sa discursivă* ci și *identitatea destinatarilor* mesajului său. „Locul” pe care îl rezervă acesta *colocutorului/colocutorilor* săi este esențial deoarece dacă nimeni din comunitatea virtuală respectivă nu va dori să asume rolul oferit de locutor în cadrul discuției, acesta va rămâne fără răspuns iar interacțiunea comunicativă nu va avea loc.

Pentru a vedea care sunt identitățile discursive asumate de către locutori în forumurile de discuții profesionale în România, singura metodă de lucru obiectivă este analizarea unor enunțuri reale aparținând

interacțiunii discursive de pe forumurile de discuții profesionale. Această analiză ne va permite să descoperim dovezi discursive concrete ale identităților asumate de participanții români la interacțiunile comunicative pe teme informatice în limba română, în anul 2021. Pe baza acestora, se va putea stabili *un profil* al locutorului român și un set de strategii discursive la care acesta face apel într-o discuție pe teme profesionale în spațiul virtual. Așa cum se menționează în studii anterioare (Varga, 2011) identitățile discursive sunt determinate lingvistic, cultural și temporal, deci datele obținute în urma analizei discursului vor putea fi folosite doar pentru a descrie locutorul român, vorbitor nativ de română și discursul acestuia în jurul anului 2021⁹.

Prin urmare, analiza secvențelor inițiale ale interacțiunilor comunicative permite descrierea identității locutorului, a identității pe care acesta o atribuie partenerului său de discuție și identificarea scopului comunicativ al mesajului. Exemplele analizate în continuare ne vor permite să obținem aceste date și, pe baza lor, să putem descrie cu precizie în ce fel se vede locutorul pe el însuși, cum îi vede pe cei cu care discută și ce face pentru a obține ceea ce dorește în comunicarea din spațiul virtual.

O primă identitate ce poate fi observată în aceste forumuri este aceea a unei „persoane care are o problemă” în diferitele sale ipostaze:

Ex. 1: *Va salut, am si eu o problema [...] Un sfat cum as putea remedia problema?*
*Multumesc*¹⁰

În acest prim exemplu, locutorul asumă rolul unei „persoane care are o problemă”, dar care totuși nu este gravă. De asemenea, se poate observa că nu asimilează *ignoranța* profilului identității sale, locutorul nu spune că *nu știe* sau că *nu are competențele necesare*. Scopul comunicării sale este „*căutarea unui sfat*”, deci nu este vorba despre a *ști/a învăța*, prin aceasta atribuind

⁹ Este identitatea pe care o analizăm în prezentul studiu. Identitățile discursive se pot studia și în diacronie, pentru aceasta însă, corpusul de texte trebuie adaptat la perioada studiată.

¹⁰ Discursurile nu au fost modificate sau editate, dacă acestea au fost scrise fără diacritice, așa vor fi afișate în acest studiu. Din motive de spațiu, a fost omisă partea tehnică a mesajelor, păstrându-se doar secvențele care construiesc identitățile implicate în interacțiunea comunicativă.

colocutorului un rol secundar. Observăm că identitatea discursivă a locutorului este plasată într-o poziție de forță, asumând identitatea „persoanei care face și care este dispusă să asculte sfaturile altora” și că poziția pe care o oferă colocutorului, celui care are competențe specializate, este una secundară, fără autoritate, cea de *sfătuitor, consilier, asistent*. Locutorul alege pentru încheierea discursului său o marcă de politețe cotidiană.

Ex. 2: *Salutare! Am o problema la Windows 10 PRO.[...] Care a mai patit asa si a rezolvat problema?*

În al doilea exemplu, formula de inițiere a interacțiunii comunicative este mai familiară decât în exemplul anterior, iar discursul se păstrează în același registru până la sfârșit. Astfel, se poate observa expresia „am o problemă la Windows...”, precum și formula de încheiere care este o întrebare directă adresată membrilor forumului prin care locutorul atribuie o identitate precisă „o persoană pățită care a rezolvat respectiva problemă”. De remarcat că nu interesează competența și nici cunoașterea atâta vreme cât problema se rezolvă. Locutorul nu asumă ignoranța, care se subînțelege din text.

În exemplul 3, situația este similară ca structură discursivă. De remarcat că locutorul se adresează „comunității” în ansamblu și construiește o identitate discursivă colectivă evitând să se poziționeze în vreun raport discursiv, acesta se construiește prin inferență. Astfel, colocutorul este un personaj multiplu, neindividualizat, impersonal. Discursul scris este completat de imagini, necesare din cauza schematismului verbal al locutorului:

Ex. 3: *Salut comunitate!*

Am o problema la instalarea windows-ului de pe stick [...]. Poze aici:

O identitate asemănătoare cu cea menționată anterior este asumată în exemplul 4. Aici problema este considerată ca fiind gravă, identitatea asumată de locutor fiind aceea a unei persoane care se confruntă cu o problemă serioasă și care dorește să acționeze în vederea rezolvării acesteia „ce aş putea să fac?”. De asemenea, locutorul nu vrea să pară neajutorat, astfel, înainte de a apela la ajutorul celorlalți menționează că a încercat să rezolve

problema și doar în fața eșecului se îndreaptă spre ceilalți *căutând ajutor* (scopul inițierii interacțiunii comunicative). Este de remarcat faptul că nici acest locutor nu asumă ignoranța, ci preferă să se manifeste subiectiv, arătându-se preocupat că ar putea face greșeli „*mi-e frică că aș putea să șterg ceva...*”. Bineînțeles, în acest context, ștergerea datelor poate fi cauzată doar de ignoranța în materie. De remarcat secvența inițială a discursului, un salut informal dar neutru, și secvența discursivă de încheiere, care fac ca acest locutor să fie mai politicos decât cei anteriori.

Ex. 4: *Buna.*

am o problema grava cu tastatura de la laptop [...] ce as putea sa fac? am incercat cateva variante de pe internet dar nici una nu functioneaza, iar ca sa intru in bios sau ceva de genul mi-e frica ca as putea sa sterg ceva [...]. multumesc de ajutor. numai bine.

O identitate mai formală și cu o politețe mai marcată discursiv (adresarea la persoana a II-a plural, prezenta verbului *a ruga*) este cea asumată de locutor în exemplul 5. Este o identitate care își afirmă ignoranța eufemic: „*nu am mare experiență*”. Scopul comunicării este solicitarea unei recomandări: „*vă rog să-mi recomandați*”, „*îmi puteți recomanda*”. La fel ca în cazul identităților anterioare, și această identitate discursivă, chiar dacă este mai formală, nu acordă o poziție de autoritate celui care are avantajul cunoașterii. Locutorul este actorul principal, cel care acționează și știe ce vrea, colocutorul trebuie doar să îi facă niște *recomandări* pentru ca acesta, în ciuda lipsei de competențe, să poată rezolva problema. Solicitarea unei recomandări scoate din discuție *cogniția/transferul de cunoaștere/învățarea*. Locutorul nu dorește să își îmbunătățească cunoștințele și nu vrea să învețe nimic nou.

Ex. 5: *Vă rog să-mi recomandați un program pentru backup [...] recunosc că nu am mare experiență pe windows 10, ... Îmi puteți recomanda un program care să poată face treaba asta și pe windows 10? Mersi frumos!*

În exemplul 6, se poate observa și o identitate care asumă ignoranța indirect, prin afirmarea dorinței de „*a ști*”. Mesajul este foarte scurt, impersonal, orientat înspre problema tehnică, identitățile discursive se

subînțeleg doar. Este vorba despre locutor, o persoană care nu are cunoștințele necesare și care „*vrea să știe*”, aflată în interacțiune cu „*o persoană care știe*” și de la care așteaptă transferul de cunoaștere. Nu există nicio raportare discursivă explicită la identitatea colocutorului, totuși raportul stabilit este cel clasic *cunoscător-novice*:

Ex. 6: *As vrea sa stiu si eu care e diferenta dintre x32 si x64.*

În alte situații ignoranța este afirmată explicit de către locutor, dar niciodată complet, prezența atenuatorilor discursivi „*nu prea știu eu cum se face... sau dacă am nevoie de o aplicație...*” fiind menită să reducă impactul unei ignoranțe complete din mesaj. Astfel, există un locutor care își asumă ignoranța și care, în ciuda acesteia, este plin de inițiativă „*...m-am gândit să fac o partiționare...*”. Scopul comunicării, din nou, nu este cunoașterea, ci găsirea de idei noi. În acest context, locutorul construiește identitatea colocutorului privindu-l în ansamblu, în calitate de comunitate, nu de individ, ca o „*sursă de idei noi*”, nu ca sursă de cunoaștere.

Ex. 7: *Salut*

Am un hdd de peste 400 de Gb mai exact de 470 si as vrea sa fac o partiționare.

În primul rand mam gandit sa fac o partitionare [...]

Acum nu prea stiu eu cum se face partitionarea asta, sau daca am nevoie de o aplicatie anume. Daca aveti alte idei [...] ar fi excelent. Multumesc anticipat.

Identitatea asumată în exemplul 8 de către locutor este aceea a unei persoane care are nevoie de ajutor, care „*roagă să fie ajutată*”. Este un discurs mult mai subiectiv decât cele anterioare, mărcile subiectivității fiind mult mai prezente. Scopul comunicării enunțat inițial este nevoia imperioasă de ajutor pentru a rezolva o situație descrisă pe larg și din care se poate observa că locutorul nu este o persoană pasivă care așteaptă să îi rezolve cineva problemele. Dimpotrivă, se menționează o suită de acțiuni terminate în eșec „*am fost la un service [...] am reinstalat Windows [...] am pus driver și tot nimic*”, narațiune menită să justifice apelul insistent la ajutor. Se poate observa cum, dacă la începutul discursului locutorul se poziționează pe o poziție de slabă autoritate cerând ajutorul celorlalți, la sfârșitul comunicării, nu mai dorește ajutor, ci are nevoie doar de „*sugestii*”. Se observă cum, odată cu ultimele

cuvinte ale comunicării, de la o poziție modestă de „vă rog, am nevoie de ajutor”, locutorul se poziționează pe o poziție de autoritate, emite evaluări ale situației „ciudat rău” și solicită incisiv „Sugestii?”:

Ex. 8: *Nu stiu daca am ales bine sectiunea dar va rog, am nevoie de ajutor! [...] am fost la un service cu unitatea sa imi puna cooler si ssd. Am reinstalat windows. Am pus driver audio si tot nimic. La Sound nici nu imi apare acea chestie cu Speaker (High Definition Audio). Apare si dispare.... ciudat rau. Sugestii?*

O altă identitate asumată este aceea a *autodidactului* (Ex 9), care „*acuma caută pe net*” cunoașterea necesară pentru a putea rezolva problema deși faptul că „*nu mai știe dacă avea activată opțiunea*” construiește prin inferență un discurs al ignoranței. Observăm aici o identitate care încearcă să disimuleze ignoranța printr-o serie de acțiuni care se vor reparatoare pentru situația în care se află „*caut pe net [...] caut CD-ul de Windows*”. Toate aceste acțiuni sunt contrazise de fraza „*Până atunci poate aveți voi idei mai bune [decât mine]*”. Observăm un locutor care *disimulează ignoranța*, nu o recunoaște dar nici nu este dispus să recunoască faptul că ceilalți îl depășesc din acest punct de vedere. Cei cărora li se adresează nu sunt apreciați pentru competențele lor, colocutorul este doar o „*sursă de idei mai bune*” și nimic altceva, celălalt este o sursă de idei pe care locutorul le poate folosi. Aici se exprimă o practică obișnuită în spațiul virtual, aceea de a te folosi de ceilalți în folosul propriu.

Ex. 9: [...] *Acuma caut pe net ce e de facut, sa fac un usb bootabil ca sa pot initializa Windows Recovery, desi nu mai stiu daca aveam pornita optiunea, Incerc sa caut CD-ul de Windows. Pana atunci poate aveti voi idei mai bune.*

Exemplul 10 construiește o identitate a locutorului într-un fel destul de neașteptat. După prezentarea aspectelor tehnice, locutorul intervine *ex-abrupto* întrebând „*Care-i șpilu'?*” ca strategie discursivă de obținere a cunoașterii de care are nevoie. Această primă întrebare informală este completată cu o a doua care înglobează și un răspuns, ea exprimă o posibilă cauză a problemei, conform locutorului. În ceea ce privește identitatea colocutorului, care ar putea rezolva situația, este vorba despre o persoană

„care a pățit și știe vreo soluție”. Astfel, locutorul adresându-se utilizatorilor care l-ar putea ajuta cu *„voi”* nu îi conceptualizează discursiv ca *„persoane care dispun de cunoștințe și competențe specializate”*, ci ca *„persoane care știu pentru că au pățit asta înainte și s-au descurcat”*. Prin urmare este vorba despre o cunoaștere simplă, pragmatică, ce nu implică neapărat competențe de specialitate. Forumul, pentru acest locutor este conceptualizat discursiv ca *„un loc în care pot să îmi încerc norocul”*.

Ex. 10: *Asa cum zice si titlul, daca deschide Desktop-ul*

[...] *Care-i spilu? Imi porneste File Explorer fara drepturi de administrator sau cum? Nu stiu daca a patit cineva chestia asta si stie vreo solutie, da' imi incerc norocu' la voi.*

Un discurs al ignoranței construit pe elementul surpriză se poate observa în exemplul 11. Locutorul este luat prin surprindere de o defecțiune tehnică pe care nu o poate explica. Așa cum se poate observa, mesajul este unul dintre cele mai formale dintre cele analizate până în prezent, formula de salut este cea standard, identitatea colocutorului se construiește discursiv ca o identitate colectivă *„tuturor”*, iar membrilor comunității virtuale li se recunoaște statutul de *„oameni care știu”*. De asemenea, se poate observa că vorbitorul își exprimă subiectivitatea la nivel discursiv construind un discurs extins. El este surprins de problemă și recunoscător pentru informațiile primite.

Ex. 12: *Buna ziua tuturor!*

[...] *Am constatat cu suprindeere ca atunci cand tastatura este conectata, nu se poate scrie [...] Daca cineva cunoaste vreo modalitate prin care se pot introduce diacriticele as fi extrem de recunoscator.*

Așa cum se poate observa din exemplele analizate în această secțiune, în forumurile de discuții profesionale există o interacțiune permanentă între *discursul ignoranței* și *discursul cunoașterii*, exprimat direct, inferențial sau eufemic. Felul în care se construiesc identitățile discursive implicate în interacțiunile comunicative ne spune ce este pentru vorbitorul nativ de limba română din anul 2021 *forumul de discuții profesionale*.

Concluzii

Concluziile pe care le putem trage în urma trecerii în revistă a genului discursiv *forumuri de discuție profesionale* sunt legate în primul rând de faptul că acesta pare să devină o prezență stabilă în zona comunicării virtuale orientate înspre transmiterea de cunoaștere specializată și în zona comunicării didactice instituționale, ca parte a unor *platforme didactice virtuale*. În ceea ce privește România, se constată faptul că popularitatea forumurilor a scăzut foarte mult în ultimii zece ani în favoarea comunicării multimedia și că, din numeroasele forumuri de discuție accesibile în spațiul virtual românesc, în prezent, există foarte puține care să mai fi rămas active.

Din punct de vedere discursiv, observarea interacțiunilor comunicative din forumurile web profesionale ne permite să afirmăm că, în comparație cu studiile realizate în urmă cu un deceniu, identitatea interlocutorilor și raportarea lor la *cunoaștere* și *ignoranță* s-a schimbat. Astfel, vom observa că locutorul, în loc să se poziționeze pe o poziție de slabă autoritate, unde ar trebui să fie din cauza lipsei sale de competențe specializate, asumă o poziție de autoritate și plasează persoana competentă într-o poziție secundară, de *asistent*, *sursă de date*, *sursă de idei*. Pe lângă aceasta, se poate observa că locutorul, în ciuda ignoranței sale, nu este dispus să achiziționeze cunoașterea. În prezent, asistăm la o comunicare în care locutorul ignorant nu dorește să *învețe*, ci dorește să rezolve o problemă cu ajutorul cuiva care știe fără a recunoaște sub nicio formă superioritatea acelei persoane. Se poate vedea cum, la nivel discursiv, ignoranța și cunoașterea sunt puse sub semnul egalității. Știința, cunoașterea nu mai reprezintă o marcă de superioritate. Dimpotrivă, cel care știe trebuie să asume poziția de *asistent*, *sfătuitor*, *sursă de idei* pentru cel ignorant.

Pe de altă parte, asumarea ignoranței ca parte a identității discursive a locutorului pare un act foarte dificil. Locutorul, din exemplele analizate, se pare că preferă omiterea, diminuarea sau disimularea ignoranței, prin aceste strategii discursive acesta indicând că este perfect conștient de aceasta doar că nu dorește să o recunoască și să o asume.

Această schimbare surprinzătoare a modului în care cel care nu știe, dar are nevoie de cunoaștere se raportează la cel care are competențe într-un

anumit domeniu și este dispus să ajute, s-a petrecut într-o perioadă relativ scurtă, un deceniu, comparațiile cu alte studii similare permițându-ne să afirmăm că în cadrul forumurilor de discuții identitatea discursivă era asumată diferit în perioada 2000-2015.

Alte trăsături discursive tipice comunicării în forumurile de discuții profesionale în limba română sunt următoarele: cea mai mare parte din mesaje începe *ex-abrupto*, fără o formulă de deschidere și fără nicio formulă de adresare. Limbajul folosit cel mai adesea de către utilizatori este unul informal, familiar. Nu se folosesc diacritice aproape deloc iar greșelile de scriere sunt foarte frecvente. La nivel discursiv, în prezent, în comunicarea în limba română în forumurile de discuție profesionale, tema principală a discuției este strict problema tehnică pe care locutorul dorește să o rezolve. Acesta transmite o intenție comunicativă diferită de ceea ce se putea observa în forumurile de discuție profesionale de acum un deceniu. Astfel, nu se mai caută cunoașterea, înțelegerea problemei, a cauzelor sale și a mecanismului care a declanșat respectiva problemă. Ceea ce caută în prezent utilizatorii români pe forumurile specializate este o cunoaștere simplă, pragmatică, o soluție rapidă și care nu necesită efort intelectual pentru problema cu care se confruntă. Locutorul construiește discursiv identitatea partenerului de discuție în spațiul virtual nu ca o „*persoană care știe, care a studiat și care a acumulat cunoștințe de-a lungul timpului*”, ci ca „*un asistent, un sfătuitor, un om pățit și care are idei folositoare*”, pe scurt o persoană cu resurse cognitive a cărei cunoaștere îi poate fi de folos locutorului ignorant pentru a rezolva o problemă despre care acesta din urmă nu dorește să știe nimic. Se enunță foarte rar „*dorința de a ști*” și, în niciun caz, faptul că un interlocutor știe mai mult decât locutorul nu este motiv pentru a-l aprecia sau a-l considera superior lui.

Momentan, putem afirma că pe forumurile specializate în limba română ne aflăm în prezența unui discurs al *refuzului cunoașterii* și al *disimulării ignoranței* care poate să evolueze în viitor înspre un *discurs al imposturii*.

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Pre-service Teachers' Hands-on Experience with a Virtual Exchange and Simulation Project

RALUCA POP

Abstract. This paper sets out to investigate pre-service teachers' opinions regarding their participation in an international virtual exchange and simulation project. The aims of the project focused on the development of participants' digital competence, intercultural communicative competence, and pedagogical content knowledge. An online survey was used as a means for collecting answers. The data gathered indicate that respondents consider the project to have been useful, enriching and relevant for them, as it offered a concrete learning experience incorporated in a simulation that contributed to their professional development. Both a qualitative and a quantitative analysis were conducted to connect respondents' pre-test and post-test answers.

Keywords: *pre-service teachers, virtual exchange, simulation, intercultural communicative competence, digital competence.*

Theoretical underpinnings

New advancements in technology can innovate teacher training in various ways and enhance pre-service and in-service teachers' subject matter and pedagogical knowledge, as well as their transversal and soft skills (digital competence, problem-solving skills, intercultural competence, etc.). In the past two decades, various terms have been used to designate intercultural learning experiences mediated by technology: "telecollaboration (Belz, 2001; Warschauer, 1996), online intercultural exchange (O'Dowd, 2007; O'Dowd &

Lewis, 2016), virtual exchange (Helm, 2015), internet-mediated intercultural foreign language education (Belz & Thorne, 2006), globally networked learning environments (Starke-Meyerring & Wilson, 2008), e-tandem (O'Rourke, 2007) or teletandem (Leone & Telles, 2016)" (O'Dowd, 2018, p. 2). For reasons of consistency, this paper makes use of the term 'virtual exchange' referred to as an online collaborative project integrated within an educational programme and which connects learners from different geographical locations or from diverse cultural backgrounds. (O'Dowd, 2018, p. 1)

A virtual exchange programme is underpinned by a sociocultural view of learning which acknowledges the importance of participants' immersion in social contexts that provide valuable collaborative and interactive opportunities. (Guth & Helm, 2012, pp. 42-43) To create a blended-learning environment that is conducive to experiential learning, a new dimension was added to the virtual exchange experience, namely simulations. Simulations provide participants with a context in which they are required to identify a solution to a problem without play-acting or inventing key facts. (Jones, 2013) In this respect, simulations are different from the enactment that occurs in a role-play activity. The context of the simulations resembles a real-life situation. Participants intervene and engage in critical thinking as they are provided with sufficient information to exchange points of view, to carry out tasks and identify solutions. (Klabbers, 2009) A central element of a simulation is represented by the dialogue, as this "leads to new understandings and new knowledge" (Angelini 2021, p. 8) while "participants construct meanings" (Angelini, 2021, p. 8) through it. In this particular created context, participants engage in the simulation "with their own judgement and knowledge" (Angelini 2021, p. 1) and not according to a script they have to follow. Another important avenue of inquiry is the development of competence in a foreign language. In this respect, "simulations provide greater exposure to the target language [...] and lower anxiety in language learning". (Angelini, 2021, p. 9)

The *Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ET 2020* (European Commission, 2015, p. 9) has suggested the

following educational priority: to improve the quality and efficiency of education and teacher training. One such dimension of improving teacher training in a multicultural, multilingual, and technology-driven environment is through virtual exchange and simulation.

Virtual exchange and simulation within a pre-service teacher training programme

The educational value of virtual exchange projects coupled with simulation practices has been widely dealt with in the literature. (Dooly, 2011; Guth & Helm, 2012; Dooly & Sadler, 2013; Helm, 2016; O'Dowd, 2018; Angelini, 2021) Virtual exchange and simulation projects can be performed in various disciplines, such as engineering, medicine, or the teaching-learning process. Due to their versatility across disciplines, simulations develop participants' critical thinking, foreign language acquisition, intercultural competence and digital skills, amongst others.

This paper focuses on three main outcomes of a virtual exchange and simulation project that aimed to contribute to pre-service teachers' professional development. The project was developed in March 2021 by Laura Angelini and Rut Muniz-Calderon from the San Vicente Martir Catholic University of Valencia. Both BA and MA pre-service teachers enrolled in the teacher training programme at Babeş-Bolyai University participated in the four sessions of the project. Several professionals and pre-/in-service teachers from other universities (University of Carthage, Tunisia; Virtual University of Tunis, Tunisia; Pädagogische Hochschule NÖ, Baden, Austria; Cégep De Jonquière, Canada; Universidad Tecnológica Nacional de Buenos Aires, Argentina; Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, U.S.A; Lancaster University, United Kingdom; University of Exeter, United Kingdom; Radboud University, Netherlands) took part in the project.

The groups of students and teachers varied between 6-7 participants and observers, and they were distinct in terms of cultural and language diversity. The platform used for conducting the virtual exchange was MS teams (for synchronous meetings) and the platform Linkr (for asynchronous

discussions to share content and collaborate). All communication in the virtual exchange was carried out in English. This was either a mother tongue for some participants, a second language or a foreign language for the majority of them.

Firstly, the main outcome of the aforementioned project is grounded in the development of pre-service teachers' three types of knowledge: subject matter knowledge, pedagogical, and pedagogical content knowledge. (Schulman, 1987) Focus was placed on offering pre-service teachers a safe arena for discussing different methodologies, for analysing differentiated teaching and assessment or for understanding classroom management perspectives in an online teaching context. Moreover, the simulation bridged the gap between theory and practice and provided avenues for discussions to enhance pre-service teachers' pedagogical content knowledge. The field of teacher education has fully embraced the opportunities offered by virtual exchanges. This online collaboration in a new learning environment offers opportunities otherwise impossible to replicate in a traditional teacher education classroom. (Dooly & Sadler, 2013, p. 4)

Secondly, another targeted aim of the project was to develop participants' intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997) understood as a set of attitudes, skills and knowledge that make a speaker efficient in a variety of settings. More and more "cultural diversity and intercultural contact have become facts of modern life" (UNESCO 2013, p. 7). Therefore, to communicate efficiently in online contexts within multicultural groups entails sound language knowledge, but also sociolinguistic and discourse competence. The acknowledgment of the fact that "communication in a foreign language is inevitably cross-cultural led to an inclusion of an intercultural dimension in the framework for attaining communicative competence". (Pop, 2019, p. 17) In this regard, this virtual exchange and simulation project aimed to develop participants' intercultural communicative competence in an active manner during online interactions. Virtual exchange projects are reported to develop participants' intercultural communicative competence. (Belz, 2007) The context they provide, i.e., a multicultural one, favours authentic communication as well as easy access

to other participants and the cultures/subcultures they represent. (Kramsch & Thorne, 2002, p. 100)

Accordingly, teacher training programmes need to incorporate an intercultural perspective to equip pre-service teachers with the necessary skills, attitudes, and mindsets to manage well the multilingual and the multicultural classroom. (Pop, 2018) As such, in today's globalized world, the "teacher is expected to exhibit culturally responsive teaching" (Pop 2019, p. 14), which the diversity of encounters in a virtual exchange and simulation project can support.

Thirdly, within a virtual exchange project one has the opportunity to develop one's digital competence. (Helm, 2014; O'Dowd, 2018) In an online communicative environment, the knowledge of netiquette rules represents a valuable asset as it can make a difference between a successful and an instance of poor communication. Knowledge of working with different learning apps, programmes and engaging in critical thinking when analysing online resources constitutes other relevant aspects of the broad concept of digital competence.

The virtual project and simulation indicated in this study have engaged pre-service teachers in online intercultural interactions mediated by technology to develop their digital competence, intercultural communicative competence, and pedagogical content knowledge. Figure nr. 1 provides a visual representation of these aims:

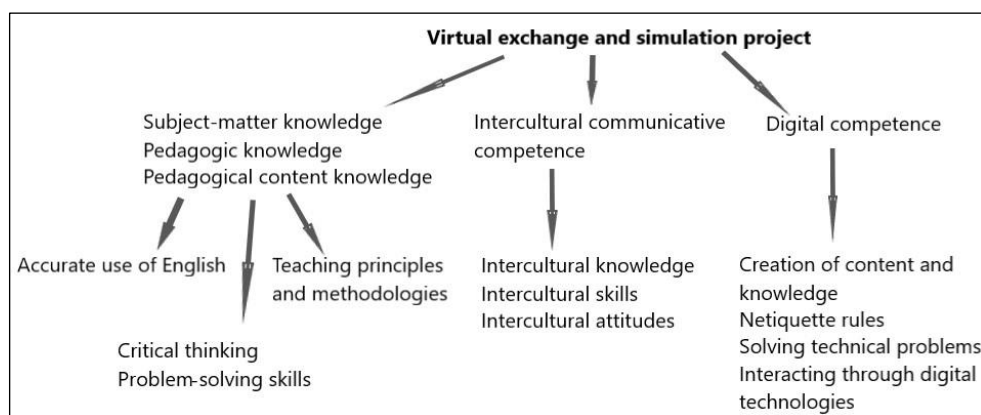


Fig. 1. Outcomes of the virtual exchange and simulation project

Research design and data collection

The research instrument employed was a questionnaire that consisted of a mix of nineteen close-ended (check box and 1 to 5 Likert scale) items and one open-ended question, aiming to collect and analyse pre-service teachers' feedback before and after the completion of the virtual exchange and simulation project. The study was based on a single-group pre-test-post-test design. Respondents filled in an electronic questionnaire (Google Forms) one week before the launch of the project and another one when the project ended, i.e., after three weeks. Answers were provided on a voluntary basis. The response rates (77%) were the same both for the pre-test and for the post-test.

Although the project involved 98 participants, the present study has gathered data only from pre-service teachers enrolled at the Faculty of Letters at Babeş-Bolyai University (BBU). A number of eighteen participants (BA or MA students enrolled in the elective teacher training programme) took part in the project on behalf of BBU.

Data analysis

The closed questions with pre-coded answers (checkboxes, Likert scale) were analysed in a quantitative manner. The answers provided to the open-ended question were analysed in a qualitative manner by focusing on key concepts.

Data analysis of the results gathered from the pre-test

It was relevant to investigate beforehand respondents' motivation to participate in the project. Half of the answers (50%) indicate a very high level of motivation, while 43% indicate a high degree of motivation.

The following items of the questionnaire focus on the aims of the project. Respondents were requested to indicate whether they were aware

that the project intends to develop their pedagogical knowledge. All answers were placed in the high agreement (21%) and very high agreement (79%) range. In addition, respondents indicated that they are aware (14%) and very cognizant (86%) that the project aims to develop their intercultural communicative competence. Still, when asked if they can communicate appropriately in an intercultural online context, answers varied from low (7%) and medium level (14%) towards a high level (50%) and a very high level (29%) of knowledge.

Respondents ranked their collaborative skills before engaging in the project as ranging from: low (7%) and medium level (21%) to a high level (57%) and very high level (14%). Most of the respondents were confident (86%) that at the end of the project the level of their collaborative skills would reach the highest level. The same timeframe (before and after the project) was applied when respondents were asked to indicate the level of their digital competence. If before the project some respondents (21%) indicated that they had a medium level of digital competence, their expectations after the completion of the project anticipated a high level (43%) and a very high level (57%) of digital competence.

As the virtual exchange and simulation project occurred online, it was relevant to inquire about the quality of the Internet connection. Most of the students had a good (57%) and very good (21%) Internet connection.

The language used in the project was English. According to self-evaluation, respondents' levels ranged between B1 (36%), C1 (36%) and C2 (29%).

The following item required respondents to indicate some elements within the project that might be difficult to handle. The checkbox option was activated and respondents were able to choose from among various answers. The highest percentage (43%) was represented by networking, while pedagogical knowledge ranked second (36%). Other aspects that have received the same percentage (29%) referred to: socializing, engaging in synchronous meetings, handling netiquette rules and collaborating in a multicultural environment. Communicating in English or being shy were the lowest ranked options at 7%.

Seven items had focused on investigating respondents' intercultural communicative competence before the project. Questions aimed to explore respondents' intercultural knowledge, intercultural skills and intercultural attitudes. Most respondents (86%) concluded that they had a good level of knowledge as concerns general cultural elements (food, art, clothing, etc.) Still, the percentages differ when knowledge of specific cultural elements as well as sociolinguistic conventions are concerned. Thus, 7% consider they have a low level, 29% a medium level, 57% a high level, and 7% a very high level.

The ability to participate freely in conversations in different cultural situations is mastered well by students: 29% have a medium level, 50% have a high level and 21% have a very high level. Conversely, most of the respondents (57%) concluded that they had a medium level of coping easily with unexpected situations in an intercultural online context. Their stress and anxiety associated with a new culture and language immersion reached a medium level for 36% of the respondents, a high level for 29% of the respondents, and a very high level for 14% of the respondents.

Being open and respectful towards other cultures is an intercultural attitude mastered very well by almost all respondents (93%). However, being a mediator between one's culture and the other's culture is quite difficult to handle for 29% of the respondents, difficult for 21%, and very difficult for 43% of the respondents.

Except for one respondent, none of the participants (93%) had been previously engaged in a similar virtual exchange and simulation project.

Data analysis of the results gathered from the post-test

Respondents' motivation during the project indicated almost the same levels as in the pre-test stage (57% a very high level of motivation and 43% a high level of motivation). Inquired about the pedagogical knowledge they had gained, respondents indicated that the level of development was high (43%) and very high (57%).

The development of intercultural communicative competence was acquired to a high degree by 36% of the respondents, while 64% considered it to be of a very high degree. A total of 79% of the respondents considered that the project offered instances for communicating appropriately and efficiently in an online context.

The project developed respondents' knowledge of general cultural facts in varying degrees: very much (50%) and much (36%). The gain of knowledge in terms of specific cultural elements varies from the highest level of agreement 57% to 21.5% for both high and medium levels. As far as collaborative skills are concerned, respondents conclude that 50% of the respondents highly agree, 36% agree, and 14% are undecided.

An equal number of respondents (36%) consider that, on the one hand, they have developed their digital competence to a high degree while the other part considers that digital competencies have been developed only partially (36%).

Respondents' Internet connection during the project was satisfactory (29%), good (43%), and very good (29%).

After the completion of the project, respondents indicated that they handled with difficulty netiquette rules (28.9%), synchronous meetings (28.9%), and pedagogical knowledge (28.9%), while networking (21%) and solving asynchronous tasks (21%) were ranked second in terms of issues. Figure nr. 2 indicates an overview of the data gathered.

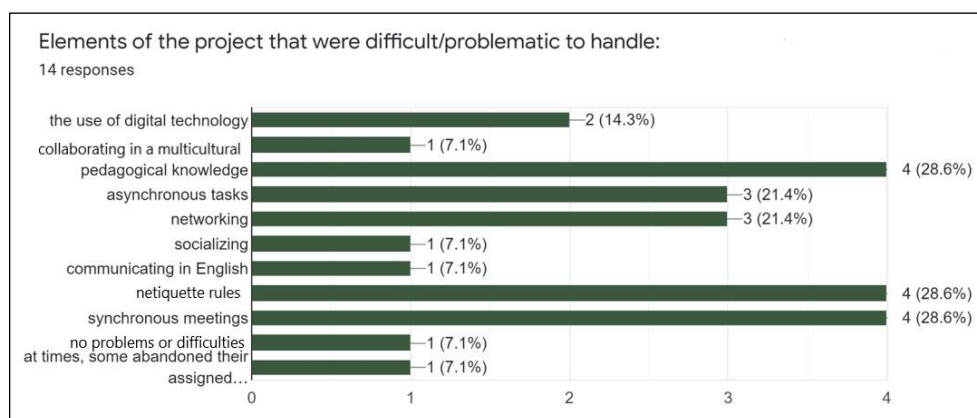


Fig. 2. Elements of the project that were difficult/problematic to handle

An equal percentage of respondents considered that they were able to cope well (50%) and very well (50%) with unexpected situations in the intercultural online context. In addition, they were able to manage well (57%) and very well (43%) the stress associated with having contact with people belonging to diverse cultures. Almost all respondents (93%) concluded that they demonstrated a very high level of openness and respect towards understanding other cultures and beliefs encountered in the project.

More than half of the respondents (57%) indicated that they mastered very well the role of mediators between their own culture and the other cultures present in the intercultural encounters. The remaining half indicated a medium level (21%) or a high level (21%).

Respondents agreed that they had developed to a very high degree (50%) their knowledge of general cultural facts pertaining to the different cultures represented in the project. The other 36% reached a high degree or 14% a medium level.

The responses focusing on gaining a deeper understanding of the sociolinguistic conventions of language use varied from 57 % (a very high degree) to similar percentages (21% for the medium and high levels).

The post-test questionnaire comprised an open-ended question that intended to engage respondents in reflective practice and shed light on the elements of the project that were relevant to pre-service teachers. This feedback was analysed in a qualitative manner. The fourteen answers provided perspectives that were connected to the main outcomes of the project, namely, developing digital competence, intercultural communicative competence, and pedagogical content knowledge. Respondents mentioned that their competence in English was put to good use and that they had the opportunity to communicate and engage in authentic interactions both with native English speakers and non-native ones.

On a general note, positive feedback was provided and various adjectives such as *enriching*, *useful*, *interesting*, *enjoying*, *amazing*, etc. were used. In addition to the pedagogical content knowledge acquired,

respondents placed a great emphasis on the development of various elements comprising intercultural communicative competence. These perspectives are indicated below in a word-for-word transcript:

[Speaking and connecting to people with different cultural backgrounds has opened up our horizons and, through our debates, we were able to discover that there are more similarities that unite us than differences.]

[Besides acquiring pedagogical and communicative knowledge, I feel that this project helped me understand the importance of working in a team and the most efficient and adequate way to share and listen to ideas/opinions on various issues not only with teammates who are assigned different roles, but also with people who come from different social and cultural backgrounds.]

Simulations provided pre-service teachers with the possibility to connect previously acquired pedagogical knowledge and apply it in a given educational context. Focus was placed on sharing teaching experience in a diverse linguistic and cultural context. This perspective is indicated below:

[I was able to revisit some theoretical aspects taught during our teacher training program at the university, apply them to our simulated scenarios and contrast them with people from other cultures.]

On the whole, respondents' feedback indicated the usefulness of incorporating such a virtual exchange and simulation project in pre-service teachers' training because it offered a hands-on experience that could not be replicated during the courses in didactics.

[All in all, it was a valuable experience for me as a future teacher and I hope I can participate in many more such intercultural exchange projects.]

Discussions

The findings of this paper are grounded in the 14 answers received in the pre-test, respectively the post-test stage. It was a first-time encounter with a virtual exchange and simulation project for the majority of the

participants. Previous data had not been collected from the same target group. Therefore, due to the small number of participants and the fact that the information gathered is mainly descriptive, generalizations linked to the entire project cannot be made.

Data analysis of the results gathered from the pre-test indicates that the majority of the pre-service teachers were aware of the targeted outcomes of the project: the development of pedagogical knowledge coupled with pedagogical content knowledge, the development of intercultural communicative competence, and digital competence. Putting these in relation to the post-test, the data indicate that these aims have been achieved by pre-service teachers as all of them indicated for pedagogical knowledge high (43%) and very high levels (57%) of completion. A high percentage was also obtained for respondents' development of intercultural communicative competence (36% a high degree and 64% a very high degree). These results can also be connected to the qualitative research which also indicated the intercultural dimension present during the entire virtual exchange and simulation project.

Respondents state that by the end of the project they had partially developed their digital competence (35.7%), they had developed digital competence to a high degree (28.6%) or to a very high degree (35.7%). These answers need to be seen in connection to the difficulties they have encountered during the project: communicating online and using netiquette rules, the use of digital technology, or engaging in synchronous and asynchronous meetings. In this respect, if respondents found these elements difficult to handle, then their self-evaluation of the acquired digital competence is objective.

If before the project, the knowledge to communicate appropriately in an intercultural online context indicated varying degrees from low to very high levels (Figure nr. 3), in the post-test most of the answers targeted a very high level, namely 78.6% (Figure nr. 4).

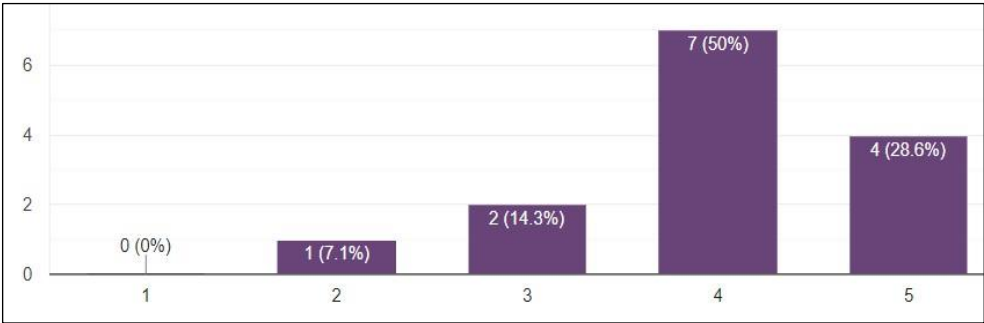


Fig. 3. The ability to communicate appropriately in an intercultural online context (pre-test)

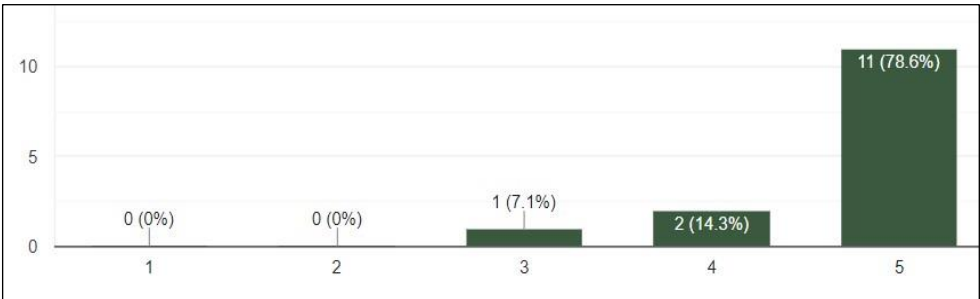


Fig. 4. The ability to communicate appropriately in an intercultural online context (post-test)

Online collaborative skills have undergone gradual improvement between the pre-test (Figure nr. 5) and the post-test (Figure nr. 6) stages where high and very high levels were indicated:

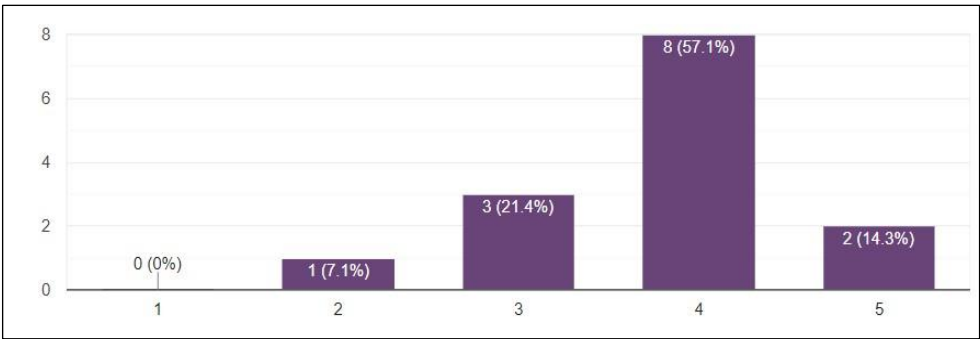


Fig. 5. Online collaborative skills (pre-test)

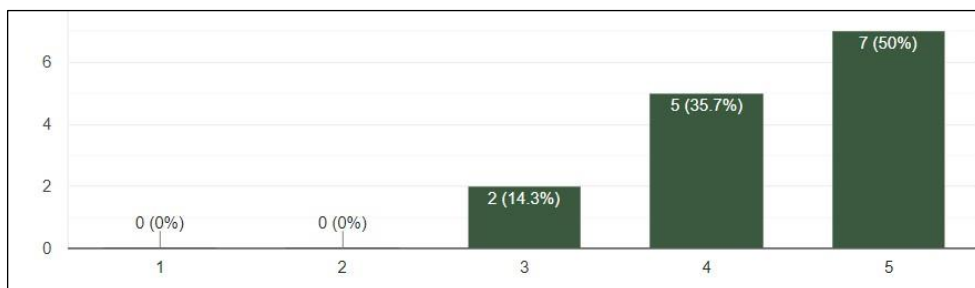


Fig 6. Online collaborative skills (post-test)

Online collaborative skills have been developed both in the synchronous and asynchronous meetings that were part of the project. As indicated in the theoretical underpinnings, the core of a simulation resides in the dialogue that is performed between the participants, as well as the critical thinking and the experiential learning that it targets. These were pillars that provided a basis for the further development of participants' collaborative skills.

If before the project, the majority of the students (86%) indicated that they were knowledgeable of general cultural elements, in the post-stage phase, many of these answers were transferred to the next level, i.e., very knowledgeable (50%).

All in all, the data gathered indicate that respondents have developed, in varying degrees, the components of their intercultural communicative competence, namely, skills, knowledge, and attitudes. In addition, they have found the virtual exchange and simulation project useful and relevant for their professional development. The analysis of the simulations has broadened pre-service teachers' perspectives as different points of view from diverse educational systems were offered.

One limitation can be identified in connection with this study. The author is both a teacher to the participants and the person to carry out the survey and interpret data. In addition, the author of the current study took part actively in the virtual exchange and simulation project. Therefore, the respondents to the survey might have been subjective to some degree when providing their answers.

Conclusions

This paper places an emphasis on the potential of virtual exchange and simulation projects to develop pre-service teachers' pedagogical content knowledge, intercultural communicative competence, and digital competence. Data were collected by conducting an online survey. Responses have been analysed both from a quantitative and a qualitative perspective. The comparison of data gathered in the pre-test with the data collected in the post-test indicates that respondents have attained, in varying degrees, all components of the intercultural communicative competence, pedagogical content knowledge and digital competence. In addition, they concluded that the virtual exchange and simulation project was meaningful, engaging, and relevant for them and that it sustained their professional development.

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Irony as Venting Negative Feelings in Online Discourse. Romanian Users and Glocal Identity

ANAMARIA RADU, ALEXANDRA COTOC

Abstract. This study focuses on several forms of irony portrayed in Facebook posts and on Romanian vlogs. The Romanian cyber-community uses various forms of irony as the means for venting their negative emotions by showing disapproval, or stating clearly their counter-position towards a certain socio-political event, or social practices. We have scrutinised videos, images and linguistic structures used by the Romanian online-community as effective means of protests in several contexts. The online multimodal construction of irony encountered in the Romanian discourses engages followers in a process of identification and self-reflection, or even self-irony. Apart from illustrating different types of irony, the content produced by the users under focus has features that distinguish the Romanian society from other nationalities: laughing about a severe situation, the language used, the rendering of major problems and concerns in Romania in an ironic, but, at the same time, distanced manner – a mirror of a specific Romanian glocal identity.

Keywords: *irony, venting, parody, stereotypes, linguistic mechanisms, protest, glocal identity.*

Introduction and Context Presentation

Kreuz argues that “humor, satire and parody all provide effective means for nonviolent protest and verbal irony is a powerful tool for all of

these” . (2020: 123) In the past years, a lot of things have changed the face of our world. People worldwide had to comply with new rules, curfews, restrictions, and changes that affected our routine. Classical forms of protesting were not possible anymore. As a result, Facebook and YouTube have become the new agora, where people are allowed to debate, protest, and state their point of view visibly and transparently.

Very often, educated users such as public figures, actors, influencers, professors, etc., use irony in their discourse to make themselves seen and understood. Verbal irony is associated with distinctly different discourse goals, such as humor and a mild form of protest.

For most of these members of the online community, irony is an explicit tool of *deconstruction*. A deconstructed idea represents a better-understood idea. Moreover, being able to filter political events or decisions, historical and social facts through irony gives the users the option to create a dispersive prism that leads to deeper comprehension. On the other hand, it engages other users and opens a suitable space for dialogue and reactions.

Suppose we take a typical example that pops up in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. In this case, the issue of restrictions, a very intensely debated topic, is ironically tackled by a Romanian user. Being aware of the importance of the restrictions imposed by the government and by the necessity of a vaccine, he is using a very subtle metaphor. He states: *I am fed up with all these restrictions! It is stupid not to be allowed to have cake only after finishing your meal! I am almost 40!* (see **Fig. 1**). His intention here is not to criticise the authorities, but the citizens who don't understand the necessity of observing the rules and taking the vaccine in order to be allowed to travel or enjoy life.



Fig. 1. Pandemic restrictions

A severe problem in the city of Cluj-Napoca, the increasing prices of house rentals due to the great number of start-ups and foreign companies, has set students and locals on fire. Many unhappy young couples and families find the prices ridiculously high for Romanian standards, that is why, instead of actually protesting (as people do in other countries), they write blogs or make ironic posts in the Social Media, meant to replace the traditional forms of protesting. Fig. 2 outlines very well this reality: *Declaration of love in Cluj: My love for you is as big as the rent!*



Fig. 2. Declaration of love in Cluj

As we could see in the previously analysed examples, there are certain mechanisms that lead to irony. In order to create and to achieve irony, we need the presence of two elements: *juxtaposition* and *contradiction*. As defined by Kreuz, “juxtaposition can be thought of as the spatial or temporal connection that exists between two things” (2020: 42). In our previous example, the actual situation in Cluj is juxtaposed by the author with the intensity and the dimension of love that theoretically could be infinite. The effect is strong, as the prices of apartments in Cluj are increasingly out of control. At the same time, “the element of contradiction triggers irony” (Kreuz, 2020: 43), the striking element in **Fig. 1**, where the author shows the clash between what the population actually wants, access to a normal life, and the impossibility of this, caused by their own refusal to get the vaccine or to comply with the health and sanitary regulations, both of which could speed up our return to normality, if fulfilled. It is exactly this lack of congruence between ideas that exerts a powerful effect on how we perceive irony and self-irony.

Nevertheless, in order to recognise and acknowledge irony, we need a key-element: common ground, for “[a]lthough common ground is important for understanding language use in general, it can also help us understand why irony is understood in some cases and misfires in others. Specifically, the amount of common ground that two people share has been shown to affect their use and their perceptions of such language”. (Kreuz, 2020: 44) As shown in **Fig. 3** below, common ground and common knowledge are vital to perceive the irony comprised by the picture. The historical fact was that the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen visited Turkey, where, during an official talk, she was left standing awkwardly while her two male colleagues were seated, as no third chair had been provided for her. The picture below is obviously a case of irony, the author photoshopped her with a portable chair on her arrival in Ankara. The problem is that a Romanian user who missed the irony, as he or she did not know the historical context, nor the fact that that was a photoshopped image, posted a comment that backfired: *She took the portable chair with her. A lot of*

brain, a lot of stupidity. Consequently, the author of the comment falls into his own trap, for lacking common ground.



Fig. 3. The visit of the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to Turkey

Theoretical Underpinnings

This study analyses irony as a venting form in online discourse. It situates it in the framework of Internet linguistics, relying heavily on the sociolinguistics theories and digital mechanisms and practices that explain the way in which irony is constructed and interpreted. Focusing on the online milieu of social network sites, irony is recalibrated by the social, technological affordances of the platforms and it is a highly contextualised digital construct. The online irony matrix involves various mechanisms that contribute to its complex and intricate nature: the different types of irony, glocality, group identity and belonging.

Starting from dictionary definitions, irony is defined as:

- “a linguistic and literary device, in spoken or written form, in which real meaning is concealed or contradicted”. (Britannica, 2019)
- “a situation in which something which was intended to have a particular result has the opposite or a very different result”. (Cambridge online dictionary)
- “a subtle form of humour which involves saying things that you do not mean”. (Collins dictionary)
- “showing that you really mean the opposite of what you are saying; expressing irony”. (Oxford Learner’s Dictionary)

Irony functions as an umbrella term, including different phenomena. Dynel (2014: 537-343) provides an overview of irony as presented in contemporary linguistic studies on irony. Drawing on the work of Lucariello 1994; Shelley 2001; Colston and Gibbs 2007, she mentions situational irony or irony of fate and she describes it as referring “to the state of affairs or events which is the reverse of what has been expected”. She also mentions verbal irony, also defined as a trope, rhetorical figure or figure of speech.

In a very recent book, Kreuz (2020) describes various types of irony, calling them “the varieties of ironic experience”: dramatic irony, cosmic irony, historical irony, romantic, situational, verbal. He also differentiates between irony, sarcasm, humor, satire and parody. The online data that we collected reflects these types of irony, but, at times, they can be seen to overlap.

Besides all these possible classifications, online irony is a product of online glocalisation understood as the relation between global trends and local applications. (Mehta, 2018: 4) Online glocalisation also means the interaction between global and local elements and the constructions of representations in a heterotopic, third space in which local practices are reflected internationally and global elements are incorporated in local communities. In this way, the online engagement of Netizens from different geographical spaces creates a sense of community that is established by default. Hence, this consolidates the spatial articulation of the Internet as a

plethora of discourses and identities. In this way, the netizens' routine to post and comment on aspects pertaining to global issues reflect hybrid practices in which different cultural backgrounds intertwine. At the same time, researchers underline the configuration of a glocal identity in a space where context collapses as we witness "the flattening out of multiple distinct audiences in one's social network, such that people from different contexts become part of a singular group of message recipients". (Vitak, 2012: 451) This context is abiding, and it can always be re-edited during the interaction with users, being an open space.

Corpus Analysis

The data selected for this study constitute authentic examples produced by Romanian users placed in the glocal space offered by Facebook (the pages of Romanian public figures and influencers) and YouTube (the channel of popular Romanian vloggers). Our corpus is multimodal and our analysis uses Kreuz's typology in order to provide an overview of online ironic productions. The analysis is two-folded, focusing both on images and the text, as these two constitute elements that complement each other. The corpus was collected during a two-month span (February-April 2021) and it reflects the local and global concerns and issues, the online discourses signalling different group identities, through the categories of *identity-as-sameness* (contact with what is different) and *identity-as-uniqueness* (intersection of *identity-as-sameness* categories). (Joseph, 2004: 37)

As mentioned above, Kreuz defines and exemplifies the faces that irony can take. Most of them are very well-represented online, the researcher noting: "irony goes online". (Kreuz, 2020: 105) The first example we selected illustrates that Romanian YouTubers depict varied social and political realities and group identities. In this case, *dramatic irony* is described as being a state of "discrepancy between the knowledge states of spectators and those of the characters in a drama or other kind of fictional work". (Kreuz, 2020: 23) On his YouTube channel, the comedian *Unguru' Bulan* often posts

cartoons featuring fictional characters, which are always inspired by real news, by socio-political events and whose protagonists are always the same four characters. As represented in **Fig. 4.**, the four cartoon personages are protesting against the renewed restrictions imposed by the Romanian government at several stages during the Covid-19 pandemic. Their discourse and their level of education, as well as their confusion regarding the reasons for their participation is very well reflected in the screenshot. The slogans are written in glaringly poor, non-standard Romanian, they contain grammar errors and indicate disorientation. It is clear for the viewers that the characters are mere impersonations of the ordinary confounded citizen: *Jos tăt felu'!* [Down with everything!], the title of the video: *Jos Pandemia!* [Down with the Pandemic!]. Through these slogans, the aim is to mock the people that participated in these protests and had no clue about the source of the problems and the real reasons for these restrictions.



Fig. 4. Protest against restrictions

Figures 5 and **6** can be situated in the category of *cosmic irony/irony of fate*. According to Kreuz (2020: 25-26), this type of irony overlaps with dramatic irony and situational irony to some extent. What differentiates cosmic irony from the other two types is the implication of a meddling agent (supernatural force, fate, chance) that baffles people and plays with their hopes and wishes. The term “cosmic” also highlights a boost of ironic engagement

from the speaker's part. In this way, the term is used as an intensifier. However, it can also be used to show events that are "coincidental, poignant, or merely inconvenient".

Figure 5 contains as a heading the statement "carantina nu o [să] dureze mult" [the quarantine will not last long]. This statement highlights hope and optimism, but it is immediately followed by a counter perspective through the intertextual reference to the series "The Young and the Restless", a popular TV soap opera renowned for its longevity. In this way, the post is epitomising the unanticipated duration of the pandemic and the people's helplessness in the face of it:



Fig. 5. Quarantine

The first part of the post illustrated in **Figure 6** is constructed like a news report, presenting a fact: *The ceiling of a recently renovated school collapsed on some benches. The renovation was done by three companies from Bucharest and the cost was over 500,000 euros.* The second part deviates from what seemed to be an informative text to two instances of cosmic irony through which the user is venting his anger on the banks for corruption and the cause of the condition of schools in Romania. The first instance is realised by the sentence: *și tavanul nici măcar nu s-ar fi prăbușit peste niște bănci care ar fi meritat asta, ci peste niște bănci școlare* [and the ceiling did not even collapse on some banks that deserved it, but on some school desks]. The word *bancă-bănci* in

Romanian can mean two different things: 1. “an organization where people and businesses can invest or borrow money, change it to foreign money, etc., or a building where these services are offered” (Cambridge Online Dictionary) and 2. furniture used in schools for sitting, reading and writing purposes (school benches and desks). The second instance of cosmic irony is achieved by the last sentence of the post which underlines the fortunate and coincidental event of online schooling which has prevented such casualties: *Brusc, școala online nu mai pare atât de rea* [Suddenly, online school doesn't look so bad anymore].



Fig. 6. Corruption

One of the most widespread types of irony is *historical irony* defined as “the sin of viewing the past from the point of view of the present”. (Kreuz, 2020: 31) Because of the fact that Romanian influencers are vocal about political life, there are always such examples on their blogs or walls. A very recent set of events is the death of Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh, which coincided with the death of a famous American rapper, DMX, who was called the King of Hip Hop. As the Romanian users are always up-to-date regarding international events, they never miss the opportunity to comment on these facts. They are

being ironic in relation to the title Prince versus King: *Zi tristă pentru monarhie. A murit și Prințul Philip și regele DMX* [Sad day for the Monarchy. Both Prince Philip and King DMX have died] (see **Figure 7** below).



Fig. 7. The death of Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh

Moreover, two other users posted photoshopped pictures of Iliescu, the first president of Romania after Communism fell (see **Fig. 8**). This President is well known both for monopolising the political power after the Romanian Revolution and not being able to lead the country to actual democracy, but also for being *immortal*. Romanians make jokes about Iliescu's age and the fact that he has lived longer than any other leader or public figure. In the photoshopped photos below we can see Iliescu sad about the deaths of two such prominent figures. The authors of the photos paraphrase Iliescu who is known for his *Măi, dragă!* [Oh, dear] saying at unpropitious moments. In the photos we can see Iliescu crying and saying: *Mă, Philip, mă!* [oh, dear Philip], and *Mă, DMX, mă!* [Oh, DMX, dear].



Fig. 8. The first president of Romania after the fall of Communism

In the examples presented above, the intention of the authors is to protest against all the bad decisions Iliescu made over the years. Romanians are able to take a step back and look into the past, it is only now that they can use their knowledge and experience in order to see politicians in an objective way, criticising their leading skills in a humorous manner. After over five decades of censorship, they are finally free to use online platforms as a means to vent out their anger against corruption and incompetence.

Fig. 9 is a case of romantic irony as it offers “an all-encompassing perspective involving a continual alternation of contradictory thoughts, or a ‘tension of opposites’, such as enthusiasm and skepticism”. (Schlegel, apud. Kreuz, 2020: 35) The post includes key elements of romantic irony: self-awareness and skepticism.



Fig. 9. Authorities

Probably the most encountered type of irony in face-to-face interaction is *verbal irony*. There are several definitions of this form of irony, and most of them equate verbal irony “with the rhetorical device of antiphrasis. It corresponds to Quintilian’s formulation: *Something contrary to what is said is to be understood*” (Kreuz, 2020: 36). As we will see in the next part, verbal irony is very well represented online. Users tell personal stories and relate better to verbal irony because this is non-dependent on the context of historical or social facts, and it allows the author to be very creative. In the first example selected, the Romanian user tells us the story of his vaccination day when the doctor is telling him: *We will give you the AstraZeneca vaccine*. – which is considered a problematic one, because of the many side effects reported. Wanting to highlight the idea that Romanians never say *No!*, and that they accept their faith without protesting, the patient (here the author of the post) says: *Me, a typical modest Romanian, I answered: Give me from the ones that you have already opened*. This is a situation that could illustrate the stereotype that Romanians are always obedient, thinking that they will never have access to the best healthcare system. It is obvious that the author’s intention was to criticise the system, but it is also a bittersweet case of self-irony. The cherry on the top is the comment someone else posted: *I told them to give me what was already broken and squeezed out of the mop* (see **Figure 10**).



Fig. 10. Vaccination

Often a way of raising awareness towards the media and fake news, verbal irony is present in online discourses. If we take a look at **Figure 11**, we can see that the user posted on his wall a typical case of manipulating the audience, where the headline reads: *A man has died one day after the vaccine*. However, if we continue reading, we find out that the man had been stabbed (after receiving the vaccine). Moreover, the Facebook user explains his intention in one of his further comments: *This post is meant to induce drama. There is no such news. There are other instances, very close to one, but not this one*. It is well known that the last couple of years were characterised by the manipulation of the media and journalists, and in Romania, there are plenty of examples.



Fig. 11. Media manipulation

Who would have thought that ordering food online would become a necessity and the only substitute for eating out? Moreover, who would have imagined that delivering food might one day be the only reason for being allowed on the streets after 10 pm? In the context of The Covid-19 Pandemics, when humanity suddenly had to comply with strict rules, curfews and lockdowns, different examples of *situational irony* occurred. The

delivery guys were allowed to be on the streets after 9 or 10 pm, as they were doing their job. Someone working for Glovo, a delivery service, decided to be ironic towards the situation and posted the following image and message on their Facebook account: *Glovo bag for sale for going out at night* (See **Figure 12**). This is a relevant example for *situational irony*, defined by Kreuz as the type of irony connected to “unexpected occurrences or poignant outcomes”. (2020: 27)



Fig. 12. Food delivery

Kreuz makes another very important distinction: **stable** irony and **unstable** irony. (Kreuz, 2020: 37) Stable irony involves intentional use and unambiguous meaning. In this respect, Figure 13 shows a user who is ironic towards the absurdity and incoherency of fixed language, the so-called wooden-language: *Don't touch! High risk of dying through electrocution and from a 500 lei fine*. The user's reaction is valid, and the irony expressed is intentional and unambiguous: *The fine will be paid in 48 hours at the devilomat among the clouds, on Boiler Street no. 380V*.

All the examples presented before could be placed in the category of stable irony, as they all involve intentional use. “**Unstable** irony, on the other hand, refers to situations in which the author's intent is unclear. This might happen, for example, in a conversation between two strangers on a subway platform, since they lack knowledge about each other that would help them determine ironic intent”. (Kreuz, 2020: 38)



Fig. 13. Wooden language

Last, but not least, Kreuz (2020: 38) makes a clear distinction between irony and sarcasm. He says that sarcasm is the type of verbal irony in which the intention is to cause pain. Let us take a look at **Figure 14**: *A bigger sin than eating Salami during the fasting time is to listen to him*. In this example, the author is referring to Salam, a *manele* singer (a music genre that is considered of low quality, because its lyrics are usually very simple and vulgar, and the musicline is very unsophisticated).



Fig. 14. Music genre

We can read between the lines and decrypt the intention of the author, who is ironic towards the people who listen to this kind of music and towards certain religious practices. His intention is clear: to make people feel bad or guilty for listening to this kind of lousy music.

Another example of pure sarcasm is the following post: *Why are conspiracy theories more easily accepted than the scientific ones? Because in order to understand the scientific ones, you have to study.* **Figure 15** is strongly related to the fact that people in Romania refused vaccination because there were many ideas voiced against it. The population started to believe most of them, without actually thinking about the long hours and sleepless nights that scientists spent while developing the vaccines. The result of spreading these conspiracy theories was that people stopped believing in actual science and this was a long disputed subject, probably not only in Romania.

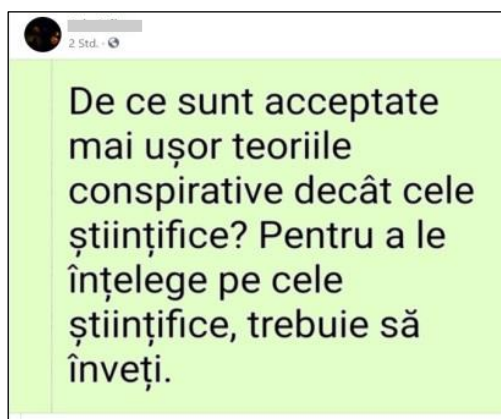


Fig. 15. Conspiracy Theories

Discussion of Results

As our corpus shows, we can encounter so many different types of irony represented in the users' discourses. This study only presented a selection of some representative samples of posts produced in the February-April 2021 time span. There are many more examples, as this is a widespread

mechanism that Romanian users employ when posting opinions and comments related to political and socio-economic events.

As we could see in the selected examples, irony in different forms represents a preferred form for venting emotions and taking sides in a political or social debate. Maybe because it is wittier, maybe because it is funnier or simply because it triggers and invites other users to pick up and carry on indefinitely a discussion, irony has been predominant on many Facebook walls and YouTube channels within the last couple of years. This type of discourse has been a constant form of expressing the attitudes of glocalised Romanian Netizens.

Conclusions

In order to cope with restrictions, political and social problems during the Pandemic, Romanian users express their thoughts in an ironic or even sarcastic manner on their personal YouTube channels, on their Facebook walls or on their blogs. After years of censorship, during the Communist regime, Romanians are finally vocal. And if they are not allowed to protest on the streets, they have found the online sphere to make themselves heard and be validated.

For most of the Romanian Netizens, irony is a tool of *deconstruction*. The online filtering of political events and decisions, historical and social facts through irony gives us the opportunity to create bridges between globality and locality, as well as between communities or people that share a particular set of values and are living the same realities.

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III. GRADUATE PAPERS

Open-Source Identity in Videogames Live-Streaming

LAURA-OANA HERȚANU

Abstract. This article presents the results of a 12 month research on the streaming platform Twitch.tv regarding streamers' online identity, using mixed research methods. The analysis provided me with relevant results regarding the type of identity streamers assume in the specific context of live-streaming, namely an open-source identity, an extension of their online identity which is enabled by the communal audience and the technology behind live-streaming.

Keywords: *live-streaming, twitch.tv, online identity, open-source identity.*

Live-streaming

The emergence of new technologies and media allows anyone to create their own reality. Over the past years, live-streaming, a popular phenomenon, has proven to be of interest to internet studies researchers.

The technology behind Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) has been around since the late 90s; however, it is only in the 2000's that the technological infrastructure has developed to the necessary level for the mass market. Around 2009, video broadcasting became possible to anyone on platforms like Justin.tv (now known as Twitch.tv). Defined as an experience through which '*anyone can become a TV provider*'¹, live

¹ Pires, K. & Simon, G. (2015). YouTube Live and Twitch: *A Tour of User-Generated Live Streaming Systems*, 6th ACM Multimedia Systems Conference, 225-230.

streaming is real-time user-generated broadcasting performed online. This presents a paradigm shift for how gaming content is consumed, as Burroughs and Rama² point out, by being both real and virtual and thus blurring the lines between face-to-face communication, digital communication, social media, and of course, games.

Twitch.tv is one of the best known live-streaming platforms, having videogames as the core content, although other categories of user-generated content are becoming increasingly popular. Twitch.tv, colloquially known as 'Twitch', was launched in 2011 as a spin-off of another popular streaming platform, Justin.tv. Justin.tv had been around since 2007 and it focused on a broader spectrum of streams, on the more general-interest side. The gaming category of Justin.tv began to gain popularity and it was one of the fastest growing categories. Consequently, in June 2011, Twitch.tv was born, focusing solely on video-games live streaming. Since then, its popularity has significantly increased – to the point where Justin.tv Inc. rebranded to Twitch Interactive. With more than 45 million unique visitors in 2013, Twitch became an attractive player and it was not long until its potential was recognized. One year later, in August 2014, it was acquired by Amazon for almost \$1B. At that point, Justin.tv was discontinued.

Twitch.tv continued its upward trend throughout the years. By 2017, Twitch reported a 15% increase in broadcasters number compared to 2015, reaching over 2 million unique streamers per month and over 15 million unique daily visitors³. In 2018, the company reported 3.4 million unique broadcasters every month on average and more than 550 billion minutes watched⁴ (see Fig. 1).

² Burroughs, B. E., Rama, P. (2015) "The ESports Trojan Horse: Twitch and Streaming Futures", *Journal For Virtual Worlds Research*, Vol. 8(2), 1-5, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4101/jvwr.v8i2.7176>.

³ <https://twitchtracker.com/statistics>, retrieved 01.06.2019, also see Fig. 1.

⁴ <https://twitchtracker.com/statistics>, retrieved 01.06.2019, also see Fig. 1.

TWITCH ACHIEVEMENTS THROUGH THE YEARS				
2019	2018	2017	2016	
319 BILLION minutes watched this year ▲ 19.3%	560 BILLION minutes watched ▲ 58%	355 BILLION minutes watched ▲ 21.5%	27,000+ partnered streamers ▲ 100% from 2015	292 BILLION total minutes watched ▲ 21%
4.2 MILLION monthly streamers* ▲ 24%	3.4 MILLION unique broadcasters every month in average ▲ 70%	2+ MILLION unique monthly broadcasters ▲ 18% from 2015	150,000+ affiliate streamers	2.2 MILLION unique streamers
1,275,000 average concurrent viewers ▲ 19%	1,070,000 average concur. viewers over 2018 ▲ 43%	124 MILLION total clips, that have been viewed over 1.7 BILLION times	106 minutes spent daily on Twitch per user ▲ 25% from 2012	590,000 CCV ▲ 7.3%
52,400 average concurrent live channels ▲ 28%	41,100 average concurrent live channels ▲ 67%	15+ MILLION unique daily visitors	100+ MILLIONS unique viewers per month as of May 2017	14.2 BILLION chat messages sent ▲ 55%

Fig. 1. Twitch.tv statistics

Accessible to everyone at www.twitch.tv, the website gets across its core perspective through the slogan ‘*Don’t just watch, join in*’. Twitch is more than just a website where anyone can watch others broadcast, it is the place where one can also create the show. Whether you want to stream or just to watch others stream, Twitch offers you the possibility to be a part of either of these experiences. Here, the term *prosumer*, as initially coined by Toffler⁵ presents perhaps one of its strongest applicabilities. On Twitch, users become both consumers and producers at the same time.

However, Twitch.tv is definitely not alone in the live streaming landscape. As Taylor points out⁶, all major actors in the industry, ranging from other platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, to game developers like Riot Games, Valve and Blizzard, and esports competition companies like ESL, Dreamhack and MLG, to name a few, have either started to produce and/or to distribute live streaming content. Furthermore, world renowned esports organisations are constantly looking to expand and to partner with other game streaming platforms. For example, Team Liquid, a professional gaming organisation, has recently partnered with HUYA, to broadcast the live streams of the players from North America and Europe to viewers China⁷.

⁵ Toffler, A (1980) *The Third Wave: The Classic Study of Tomorrow*, Bantam Books, US.

⁶ T.L. Taylor (2018) *Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming*, Princeton University Press, p. 4.

⁷ <https://www.teamliquid.com/news/2019/06/21/team-liquid-partners-with-huya>, retrieved 23.06.2019.

Live-streaming is generally made up of a single player or a team that broadcasts games and gives advice to viewers, while explaining strategies and gaming techniques⁸. Thus, streaming on Twitch is more than a hobby or a spare time activity. For many of the popular streamers this is a full-time job and their only source of income. Streaming multiple days a week for many hours a day in order to sustain a lifestyle by a different kind of job, usually also translates into a steady income.

Scholars have brought to our attention a new perspective on game spectatorship, often associated with a feeling of digital intimacy⁹. The audience watches their favourite streamers, learns about their game strategies, gains insight into their personal lives through the stories created around them, and interacts with them. This is also due to the affordances of the platforms – for example, Twitch is live, with conversations possible in real-time chat windows, with broadcasters visible on web cameras and with spectators that can take actions that can be visible on the channel, such as donating, subscribing, etc., as Johnson & Woodcock¹⁰ point out. Consequently, the feeling of closeness that the audience gets while watching their favourite streamer is perhaps unseen in any other media. The streamer, through their performance, makes the game progress and offers a show: if they do not perform, the show ends. The audience, although in no direct contact with the game, become part of the show by following both the in-game experience of the streamer and their performance related to it. Each streaming experience depends on different factors: the game, the interaction of the streamer with their audience, the interaction of viewers amongst themselves, the platform used for streaming, the role of other supporting channels that the streamer uses, etc. This brings forth an interesting perspective which has been widely

⁸ Edge, N. (2013) "Evolution of the Gaming Experience: Live Video Streaming and the Emergence of a New Web Community". *Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications*, 4(2). retrieved from <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=821>, on 20.04.2018.

⁹ Taylor, N. (2016b). "Now you're playing with audience power: the work of watching games", *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 33(4): 293-307.

¹⁰ Johnson, M. R. & Woodcock, J. (2017). "It's like the gold rush: the lives and careers of professional video game streamers on Twitch.tv". In *Information, Communication and Society*, first published online, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1386229>.

discussed by scholars in various fields, namely narrativity. The Ricoeurian concept of narrative identity, redefined as '*a person's internalized and evolving life story, integrating the reconstructed past and imagined future to provide life with some degree of unity and purpose*'¹¹, finds its applicability in live-streaming.

Hamilton et al.¹² argue that stream communities form around shared identities drawn from streams' contents and participants' shared experiences. Consequently, a new type of identity can be observed, namely the open-source identity, a concept I have coined to describe the identity specific to live-streaming spaces.

Open-source identity

The open-source identity refers to the way in which streamers build their online identity, namely in a public, collaborative manner. The communal audience and the shared experience of live-streaming is exactly what enables the open-source identity through a continuous performance-feedback loop. While the online identity is merely an extension of one's real identity, not opposed or completely dissimilar, the open-source identity is not a separate type of identity, but it targets a specific space in the online environment. I could, therefore, easily explain the collaborative practice between the streamer and their observers and the technology that allows this practice to take place. In naming this specific type of identity, I observe that, much as previous research, identity creation is a process. As Hall argues, '*... identity is a process, identity is split. Identity is not a fixed point but an ambivalent point. Identity is also the relationship of the Other to oneself*'.¹³ For Hall, identities are continuously open to interpretation, addition and negotiation. The process of creating an identity cannot be completed unless accepting that it is a shared construct between oneself and the other, similar to the 'good' and

¹¹ McAdams, D., McLean, K. (2013) "Narrative Identity", in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 22(3), 233-238.

¹² Hamilton, W., Garretson, O., Kerne, A. (2014) "Streaming on twitch: fostering participatory communities of play within live mixed media", *CHI '14 Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, p. 1315-1324.

¹³ Hall, S. (1991) "Ethnicity: Identity and Difference", *Radical America* 13(4), June 1991, p. 15-16.

‘bad’ juxtaposition. The representation of Self and Other allows placing this relationship in a social behavioural context, where the two co-exist and are interdependent.

This approach strongly supports the open-source identity and explains the development of streamers’ online identity as a collaborative process between the streamers (Self) and their viewership (the Other). While this is in line with previous theories, such as Butler’s ‘performative identity’¹⁴, which points out exactly the variable aspect of one’s identity, always changing and adapting, the open-source identity seen through Hall’s perspective brings in the element of ‘Other’. In the context of live-streaming, ‘Other’ can be understood as the communal audience, which is enabled by the platform, thus by technology. Streamers are defined as such only if they are tied to a particular medium (technology) and if they become observed (by the other – the viewers).

While there is still much to learn about live-streaming, it has already provided us with prolific results. Scholars such as T. L. Taylor offered a comprehensive overview of streamers as performers, arguing that broadcasting ‘became a new performative outlet, not dissimilar from theater and acting.’¹⁵ Goffman’s *Presentation of self*¹⁶ has been used as a theoretical framework within videogames studies, due to its performative component and approach. Videogames scholars have drawn upon Goffman’s performance and dramaturgical analysis and show that the social environments within videogames shape and adjust players’ identities. Evidently, this is prevalent in live-streaming, where once the streamers turn on the camera and go ‘live’, everything is performance. This type of ‘platformativity’ – Lamarre¹⁷ calls it performance via platforms – , is present in other online spaces as well (for example, on social media platforms). As

¹⁴ Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, Chapman & Hall, Inc.

¹⁵ Taylor, T.L. (2018). *Watch me play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming*, Princeton University Press, p. 70.

¹⁶ Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*, Penguin, London.

¹⁷ Lamarre, T. (2017). Platformativity: Media Studies, Area Studies. *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 4, 3, 285-305, available from: Brill <https://doi.org/10.1163/22142312-12340081>, p. 24.

Lamarre points out¹⁸, it involves a certain degree of repetition – be it content, interaction or identities, all enabled by the affordances of the platforms.

The idea of performance as ‘repetition’ and ‘ritual’ is prevalent in live-streaming, where most of the time streamers have a clear, consistent schedule, they organize their content and they define their channel guidelines. And, although I do argue that live-streaming is a type of (self) performance, my understanding of performance for the current study does not imply dishonesty. Rather, it can be tracked back to existing work by scholars who have argued for agency and intentionality, such as Goffman, Turner or Alexander. The open-source identity incorporates the element of performance, as demonstrated by the research I have conducted.

In order to achieve relevant results regarding the open-source identity, I analyzed the platform Twitch.tv using a mixed set of research methods. The first method was the participant observation one. I used participant observation to become directly involved in the medium that I research, Twitch.tv and the practices that take place on this platform, namely live-streaming. I applied my critical thinking and critical analysis from the perspective of a user on Twitch.tv and I was able to observe, follow and analyze broadcasters on a daily basis, following their streaming schedules and experiencing life ‘together’. I observed streamers ‘performing’ on content (going through most games being streamed), on popularity (both followers-count and channel views, high and low), on outstanding features (a funny channel description, a streamer with a medical condition, an elderly streamer), just to be able to engage with them and their communities. I was thus able to align, through participant observation, ‘[...] *engaging in everyday activities, on one hand, and recording and analyzing those activities, on the other*’¹⁹. Consequently, I used the participant observation for a period of 6-12 months, for approximately 2 hours daily. During this time, I was able to observe different streamers, their content, the way they organize their streams and Twitch channels and their archived content. I examined the top 10 biggest

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

¹⁹ Boellstorff, T., Nardi, B. Pearce, C., Taylor, T.L. (2012). *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds. A Handbook of Method*, Princeton University Press, p. 69.

streamers by followers count at the time, according to SocialBlade.com statistics: Summit1G, Imaqtpie, Nightblu3, Lirik, Shroud, Sodapoppin, DrDisrespectLive, Timthetatman, Dyrus, JoshOG, their number of followers ranging between approximately 2.7 million (Summit1G) and 1.3 million (JoshOG)²⁰.

The conclusions pointed me towards an interesting theoretical distinction between two different identity building strategies, namely the skills and the personality approaches. The skills-based approach applies to content creators who rely on their skill at the game(s) they play, providing high level gaming content that may not be available elsewhere, usually for a limited number of games. The personality-based approach refers to content creators who rely on their personality and have found a niche to support their content and to attract and retain an audience. Whether this is related to their charisma, joyfulness or other traits that people are proven to be generally drawn to, personality and the way content creators manage to translate it to the online environment is an important part of the process. Evidently, especially for successful, professional streamers, the two approaches intertwine and more often than not they overlap. Without being a recipe for success on Twitch, most of the big streamers in the gaming category will often mix very strong gaming skills with an entertaining personality, making the watching experience very enjoyable for their audience by providing high level gaming content in a professional, performative manner.

However, given that there are plenty of other streamers on Twitch, whose performance is perhaps measured by different metrics (for example, most viewed channel or most popular in their respective categories), but who are also relevant for an identity building analysis, I have also looked at streamers in other categories, which are not in the above mentioned top 10 category. The reason behind choosing to look at these streamers is that, while the top streamers I analyzed are definitely important and relevant to the present research, more often than not, there is not very much diversity in

²⁰ 2017-2018.

respect to what they offer. Therefore, in order to have a thorough understanding of the new streamers I analyzed, I brought forth another essential parameter for Twitch live-streaming identity, namely content. While games remain the focus of Twitch, recently quite an important number of streamers transitioned to other categories, such as IRL (In Real Life). I believe, therefore, that it is important that I should not limit my research strictly to videogames, since the research platform is starting to offer much more than that. The IRL content varies and it is probably the category where the authenticity of streamers is at its peak. Because of the variety of content that gets streamed under this category, a lot of streamers are building a community based on broadcasting their day-to-day lives. This is also a category with which female streamers seem to relate more – due to the fact that the videogames industry is still dominated by male players. Therefore, I have observed and analyzed the streams of the following streamers for an average of 15 hours in the period April-May 2019: Blondiewondie, St.Peach, Sodapoppin. These streamers are prominent in the IRL category, graded on Socialblade as B+, A and A++. I chose streamers having different grades for the specific purpose of greater diversity²¹.

After a thorough analysis, I was able to conclude that both the channel layout and the content seen on stream, along with the use of other core features of the platform, are set up in a specific way with the exact intent of creating the environment the streamer desires, thus establishing their streamer identity. And while it might not be all thought out and thoroughly planned from the beginning, the very fact that it is an ongoing process is exactly what enables the open-source identity. A streamer's identity is constantly evolving, and other than becoming perhaps the biggest and most successful streamers, for the vast majority the process of moulding their identity into something new and improved is at the very core of the streaming process. While this evolution is heavily influenced by the viewers, a streamer may take on new roles or alter their playing habits based on much more than just feedback from the viewers. In some cases the viewers

²¹ <https://socialblade.com>.

themselves help create the content or sow the seeds of new ideas. While the extent of this will vary from streamer to streamer, there is clear evidence of this process in almost all successful streams. Therefore, these findings support the open-source identity in respect to how all the core features of streaming, from content to stream layout are continuously looping from the streamers to their viewers, constantly changing, evolving and adapting in a public, collaborative manner.

While observing streamers on Twitch (and analyzing, among other aspects, their content, streaming patterns and stream layout) has provided me with these valuable findings, I wanted to get a deeper understanding of the streaming experience directly from broadcasters. Consequently, in order to better understand individual experiences in Twitch streaming, I chose an additional research method, respectively in-depth individual interviews with seven Twitch streamers. The individual experience of each streamer I talked to provided me with a better insight on understanding them and their path on Twitch, as well as their relation with their communities.

The interdisciplinary nature of my research allowed me to construct my methodology via various research methods. Therefore, I was able to look at the in-depth interviews as one of the best methods to get a more clear perspective on streamers' profiles and approaches. This method integrated with my other research methods, because it allowed me to gain the 'inside' perspective and to gather valuable information on the streaming phenomenon.

During April-May 2020, I held seven interviews with streamers on Twitch.tv. The interviews were semi-structured and were held online, 1 on 1, via audio call, on Google Hangouts and/or Discord. On average, their duration was of about 30-40 minutes. The nature of the research allowed a facile communication in a medium that the interviewees were familiar with. However, it did not allow a rigid structure of the interview, considering each streamer's experience is different, and therefore the structure had to be flexible. Another reason for choosing the semi-structured interviews was that it allowed me to better explore certain answers by asking follow-up

questions, such as ‘how come?’, ‘could you please explain?’, etc., thus getting a better understanding of each streamer’s experience.

Most interviews were held in English (5/7), as it was the language the streamers used on Twitch. Two of the interviews were held in Romanian, as it was also the streaming language of the interviewees and they mentioned being more comfortable speaking Romanian. After the interviews ended, I translated them into English and I analyzed them thoroughly .

By diversifying the profile of the respondents in terms of their content (ranging from IRL to variety to focused mainstream or indie games), their size and, implicitly, status (from unaffiliated 30 followers streamers to partners with over 47k followers), their gender (3 females, 4 males), streaming language (Romanian and English), location (Romania, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United States), and age (between 25-35), I managed to sample a micro-community that reflects the Twitch macro-community in terms of streaming patterns, typologies or audience.

As noted during the analysis of the interviews, all seven streamers I talked to mentioned several common themes that relate directly to open-source identity. Recurring themes such as community, authenticity, friendship and connection were identified in all interviews. All streamers wanted to be perceived as authentic and as good-natured as possible and even the minor ones acknowledged the importance of a community and the sense of belonging that streaming could bring to both the streamer’s and the viewer’s lives. Their identities on Twitch evolved and adapted, in time, due to various factors such as changes to the platform, to their community, their content or channel layout, etc.

The streaming phenomenon is rather complex and can be analyzed from various standpoints. The identity of a content creator on Twitch is an integral part of any stream, whether we talk about a large size, carefully crafted persona streamers or minor streamers that are just starting up their channel and are, at first, less focused on the identity aspect. Furthermore, every broadcaster revolves around their community, whether they strive to transform live-streaming into a full time job, to create high quality content, to pass their free time or to make their day meaningful. Being a streamer

means imparting some sort of a personality, qualities and, ultimately, identity to a fair number of strangers. As Twitch is becoming more diverse in terms of content, it is relatively easy for creators to find a place to fit in content-wise on the platform. However, the heterogeneous character of communities and the diversity of content viewers can choose from indicate that they are likely to migrate and disperse on the platform towards other (types of) creators.

As mentioned before, to some extent, the streamer is the reflection of the viewer and vice-versa. This exact fandom is the core of open-source identity, as it is the very identity of a specific communal audience that is required for the open-source identity. The sense of social engagement and connection between the streamer and the audience, which any broadcaster strives for, is what develops the relationship between them.

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The Use of Hashtags as Metacommunicative Devices on Social Media

MIHAELA BUZEC

Abstract. As access to internet has become almost universal, the amount of information shared online has increased unprecedentedly. Although the entire World Wide Web is, in itself, a database and search engines facilitate access to specific websites based on queries, social networks themselves represent enormous, continuously-updated databases, where information may be missed by the potentially interested—or targeted—parties. The need, then, for organizing information and making it easily accessible within a social network has hailed the ‘invention’ of the *hashtag* (#), as part of the social media affordances; back then, it was a lifesaver. Today a part of the daily vocabulary, the hashtag started out as a device to sort and filter information on social networks. It became especially popular with Twitter, a social network launched in 2006. Later, as sorting algorithms were perfected and online users became more proficient, hashtags moved on to being repurposed, adding the function of metacommunicative devices to that of metadata. In this vein, my paper surveys the use of hashtags as metacommunicative devices on social media, specifically Twitter, investigating their role as purveyors of irony, sarcasm, as well as calls to action.

Keywords: *Computer-mediated communication, hashtags, paralinguistic devices, meta-communication.*

A Brief History of Hashtags

Although the number sign—or pound sign—has had various uses before the advent of computers and the internet, after the invention of

programming languages it has become specialized for this need. Primarily, the hash symbol is used in programming languages with various functions, most of them related to signaling keywords and differentiating between different types of data input. Moving a bit forward, one of the earliest protocols for computer-mediated text communication, the Internet Relay Chat, also used the hash symbol to create groups and arrange chats based on their topics (*The Internet Society* 2000, n.p.).

As social networks became a reality, the amount of user-generated content that was being shared on the internet also increased exponentially, which led the early users and founders of social media to look for better organizational solutions. Inspired by the IRC's usage of the hash sign, Chris Messina proposed in a tweet in 2007 to use the same method for grouping and sorting content on Twitter. He also wrote a post detailing and clarifying the use of what later would be called the 'hashtag', a string of letters and symbols prefaced by the hash sign. In his blogpost *Groups for Twitter; or A Proposal for Twitter Tag Channels*, Messina explains:

the title of this post is misleading and actually not about Groups for Twitter. In fact, I'm not at all convinced that groups (at least as they are commonly understood on sites like Flickr) are ultimately a good idea or a good fit for Twitter. But, I do think that there is certainly some merit to improving contextualization, content filtering and exploratory serendipity within Twitter. (n.p.)

Although the developers were skeptical at first, the magnitude this idea reached later in 2007, during the California wildfires, helped spread the hashtag's use across Twitter. Later, Twitter made hashtags an organic part of their platform, hyperlinking them to their respective feeds and making it easier to use them as queries to search for content. Afterwards, the hashtags spread to other existent platforms, whereas some more recent ones—such as Instagram—have been using hashtags from the very beginning of their existence on the web.

What is a hashtag?

According to the Oxford Dictionary, a hashtag is “[a] word or phrase preceded by a hash sign (#), used on social media websites and applications,

especially Twitter, to identify messages on a specific topic”¹. The Macmillan dictionary added a secondary entry for hashtags’ use in spoken language, mainly “*SPOKEN* used to make a humorous point when speaking by pretending that what you are saying is a hashtag”². The use of hashtags varies from one social platform to another and a considerable difference between their Twitter and Instagram uses lies, prevalently, in the number of hashtags in one string. Whereas Twitter users add one, two, at most, three hashtags to a post, on Instagram, trending posts usually have around 10-11 hashtags, sometimes even more. This seems to be a result of employing hashtags to different ends: adding another opinion to an already formed pool of opinions on public matters (usually on Twitter), and marketing campaigns, growing in popularity so as to reach a larger demographic and raise engagement rates (usually on Instagram).

The first use is very visible in how institutions, public people, such as politicians or journalists, and organizations employ hashtags.



Fig. 1. Hashtags as markers for grouping information together

¹ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/hashtag>

² <https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/hashtag>

Figure 1 shows a representative example of how hashtags are used in a message, to add to a topic of discussion. Such situations are a common occurrence on Twitter and other networks that are now considered news sources. When looking at platforms mostly used for interpersonal communication and relationship/network building, such as Instagram, a different, but equally important function of hashtags is brought forth: increasing visibility and engagement with the post.

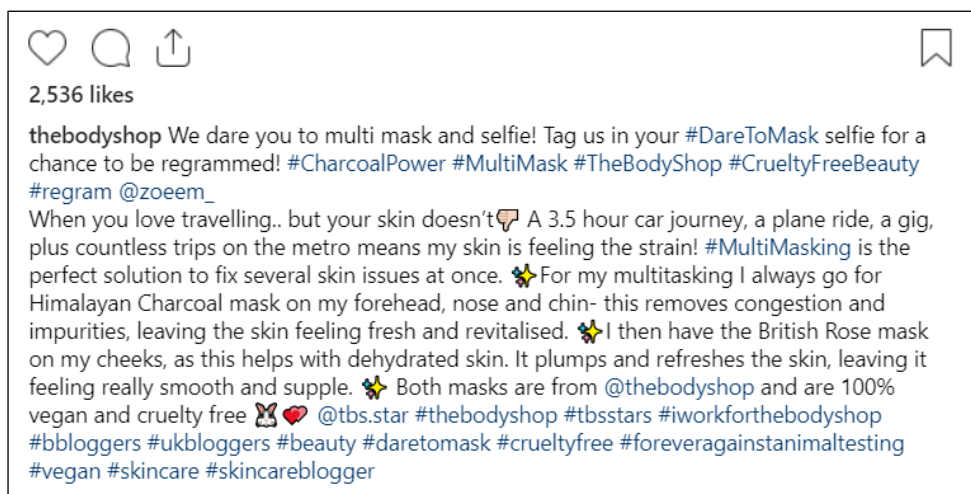


Fig. 2. Hashtags as brand marketing tools

Another example of a high incidence in hashtag use on social media is within the context of social movements and comments. Examples include “#metoo” – used to raise awareness of sexual harassment, “#NotMyPresident” – which became popular after Donald Trump won the 2016 presidential elections in the US, or the pattern hashtags “#PrayFor[City]” – used after terrorist attacks on varied cities, in order to express solidarity in mourning for the victims. Van der Berg comments on this aspect in his study on hashtags’ impact on practical theological studies, implying that “the hashtag’s function of adding the opinion of an individual to the confluence of opinions contributed by others, confirms the possibility of not only grouping information thematically, but also of opening up movements in this regard, with exponential dynamics”. (5)

In online advertising, hashtags are a particularly useful tool. Companies and brands make use of hashtag marketing to look at what is trending with their target demographics and, then, to create specific hashtags that lead to further engagement with the community. The campaign “#DareToMask” started by The Body Shop company (Fig. 2) has over 13,000 posts on Instagram from followers of this brand (as of March 2021).

Indeed, hashtags are employed in marketing campaigns, political campaigns, and generally, in advertisements, and not just online but offline as well. Several examples were gathered by Caleffi and can be seen in her study “The ‘hashtag’: A new word or a new rule?”:

[...] hashtags are no longer restricted to the online world, since they are now starting to appear also in the linguistic landscape and in a variety of offline contexts, such as advertising boards, commercial shop signs, street manifestation posters and banners, television spots and commercials, printed magazines and newspaper headlines, political slogans and speeches, to mention but a few. (46-47)

The use of hashtags has been imported into offline communication as well, with instances such as *hashtag mood* or *hashtag relatable* becoming part of the bulk vocabulary of the young generations. These are usually high frequency hashtags, or hashtags that reference a certain pop culture item, a movie or a song, in a sort of intertextuality of natural speech. The word/term/concept has also been adopted by political actors (see Romania, 2019’s European Union Parliament election campaign) to point out, in a hostile manner, people purporting ideologies that differ from the (temporary) dominant one (e.g. *haștajiști*).

In what concerns us, a question to explore—although a difficult one to answer—is whether the use of hashtag in offline communication has actually influenced, ‘in reverse’, their online use as devices for conveying irony. A reasonable counterargument would be that we first started using ironical hashtags online and then—since there is a general tendency to talk the way we write and vice-versa—the trend was transported offline for more

economical communication, reducing the paralinguistic (physical) efforts of body language and tonality in face-to-face communication.

Metacommunication

Communication is a defining element for humans, part of how we carry out our everyday lives and define ourselves in relation to others and our community at large. Yet, communication is not solely linguistic, although language carries a significant amount of importance for this task. The way in which we communicate implies a certain amount of complex paralinguistic elements as well:

Human communication is a very complex process which involves verbal exchange, but also a variety of kinetic and paralinguistic elements. These can be seen as metacommunicative signals, or messages about messages, indicating how the verbal communication should be understood and interpreted. The full meaning of the communication thus does not depend only on literal verbal meaning, but is codetermined in a critical way by the intensity and inflection of the voice, facial expression, accompanying gestures, secondary signals that we are sending to bystanders, etc. (Grof 7)

The importance of these elements cannot be denied. However, as communication evolves across different media, it also changes, losing certain elements and having to compensate for this loss. Now, with the ever-increasing popularity of computer-mediated communication, we see a gradual replacement of traditional paralinguistic devices with both linguistic and visual means.

Computer-mediated Communication

Text messaging, emailing, chat rooms, forum conversations, social networking, all of these and more are forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC³). Whatever interaction occurs between two or more people through an electronic device falls under this subcategory of human

³ By CMC I also understand communication mediated by other devices, such as smartphones.

communication. When computers first became widely available and communication via these devices was no longer reserved for technical and scientific purposes, research into this type of communication began, in an effort to anticipate how it would affect us in the long run. A research paper from 1984 discusses the features of CMC, its benefits and shortcomings, and tries to group both technical and social issues related to CMC around the following categories: "Time and information processing pressures", "Absence of regulating feedback", "Dramaturgical weakness", "Few status and position cues", "Social anonymity", "Computing norms and immature etiquette." (Kiesler et al 1125-6) Among the most interesting discussion points, I would like to highlight the following:

In traditional forms of communication, head nods, smiles, eye contact, distance, tone of voice, and other nonverbal behavior give speakers and listeners information they can use to regulate, modify, and control exchanges. Electronic communication may be inefficient for resolving such coordination problems as telling another person you already have knowledge of something he or she is explaining (Kraut, Lewis, & Swezey, 1982). [...] Computer communication might weaken social influence by the absence of such nonverbal behavior as taking the head seat, speaking loudly, staring, touching, and gesturing (R. Kling, personal communication, May, 1983). (Kiesler et al 1125)

Some would argue these questions are just as relevant now as they were back then. Let's address some of the issues, from the perspective of someone writing in 2021.

Paralinguistic realizations in CMC: emojis, gifs

One of the most commonly thought of solution for the absence of feedback and facial cues in CMC is the emoticon, or emoji. The emoticon is a series of punctuation signs that conventionally mimic facial cues, such as ":)" for a smiling face or ":(" for a sad face. These have been more recently complemented by emojis, which are cartoonish realizations of these signs, such as "😊" and "😞". Emojis have evolved to such an extent that there are now over 3,000 different emojis you can use in CMC (3,304 as of March

2020⁴). These depict emotions, relations, objects, actions, symbols, and more. Some of them even carry different meanings than what appears at face value, such as the peach emoji, being a euphemism for the buttocks.

A 2013 systematic review of research on the use and impact of emoticons in CMC looked at studies of emoticons as linguistic components and studies of their impact on message interpretation. One of the studies under review pointed to the usefulness of the emoticon as visual cue for the interpretation of the message:

In a study carried out to investigate the non-verbal communication functions of emoticons in CMC, Lo (2008) concluded that frequently when Internet users come across texts without emoticons, they find it difficult to perceive the precise emotion and the attitude expressed. On the other hand, using visual cues combined with the text gives an added positive attitude than text only (Mitchell, 1986). (Jibril and Abdullah 203)

Interestingly, some researchers point to a different use of the emoji in CMC:

Although the emoticon has been most frequently associated with adding emotion to CMD [computer-mediated discourse], at a pragmatic level, emoticons appear to clearly serve a specific purpose within the structure of the message. Specifically, we would like to propose that emoticons serve as punctuating devices in CMD. In these data, emoticons are most typically deployed at the end of sentences or clauses (when part of a parenthetical remark), or turns at chat, either with or in place of standard sentence-final punctuation marks. In this usage, the emoticon functions to close off the sentence or thought by confirming the action performed by the text. In this sense, the emoticon can be seen to complement, strengthen, or clarify the illocutionary force of the utterance, while at the same time providing a cue to interpreting the structure of the message. (Markman and Oshima 5)

Besides their function as visual cues, these devices have further developed to serve as modifiers for a sentence, providing help for the interpretation of the message. In the same study, Markman and Oshima point to the fact that the position of the emoticon is also important, as written

⁴ According to <https://emojipedia.org/faq/>.

communication lacks the possibility of simultaneity, which is present in face-to-face interaction.

In spoken interaction, nonverbal signals can occur before, during and after verbal content, and affect interaction in different ways respective to their placement. The idea of nonverbal content was largely absent in formal written English before CMD, but has become an important part of many computer-mediated interactions. (7)

More recently, especially in synchronous communication, emojis are being used as stand-alone responses as well. This is an interesting phenomenon that could signal a preference towards visual substitutes in cases when a non-verbal reaction is expected, such as laughter after a joke. However, this is not part of the present paper, nor could I find any research oriented towards this idea thus far.

Besides emojis and emoticons, GIFs also play a part in CMC. A GIF (Graphical Interchange Formats) is a looped sequence of images or a very short, soundless video, often referencing popular culture.

GIF use in computer-mediated communication (CMC) may act similarly to verbal (“mhm”, “really”, “oh”) as well as non-verbal backchannels (e.g., smiling, nodding, shaking head, looking confused) that normally occur in face-to-face conversation between speakers and listeners (Bavelas, Coates, & Johnson, 2000; Bruner, 1979). Backchannels help ground (Clark & Wilkes-Gibbs, 1986) or steer conversation by two means: reactively, by indicating uptake of prior talk, and proactively, by steering the dialogue in a particular direction based on the response provided (Tolins & Fox Tree, 2014). (Samermit 24-25)

Because GIFs usually contain faces or actions, they are dynamic and semantically-charged, gradually becoming a favorite for the expression of non-verbal cues or reactions in CMC.

The use of hashtags as metacommunicative devices

Akin to how GIFs and emojis are being used to express emotions, there are verbal or textual cues which have evolved to serve this purpose as well. The hypothesis of this paper is that hashtags have evolved beyond their

use as sorting devices to serve a wide array of functions. They can function as paralinguistic devices to indicate a frame of irony or sarcasm, as logical operators modifying the post itself, or as calls to action.

As such, the objectives of this paper are two-fold: firstly, to research studies on hashtags in the context of CMC via social media networks trying to identify the hashtags' roles, and grouping them based on the purpose they serve; secondly, to identify how the hashtags can function as paralinguistic elements (by having a contrastive meaning compared to the rest of the message, etc.).

A Systematic Review of Research on Grouping Hashtags

A number of researchers have taken it upon themselves to carry out a rhetoric analysis of hashtags and the purpose they serve on social media. Although many are interested in the technical aspect of the hashtag's evolution, social scientists are particularly interested in how they serve metacommunicative purposes, specifically. A 2011 study by Cunha et al. focused on the aspects of hashtags as equivalents of innovative uses of natural languages and the success rates of such creative instances. Another relevant study for this paper is that of Caleffi, who argues that "hashtagging could be looked at as a new morphological mechanism producing items, called hashtags, whose linguistic nature may be difficult to identify and relate to any traditional part of speech". (52)

Laucuka's 2018 study also provides plenty of context for this paper, as it seeks to identify communicative functions of hashtags. In the results, she identified ten functions, mainly "topic-marking, aggregation, socializing, excuse, irony, providing metadata, expressing attitudes, initiating movements, propaganda, and brand marketing". (61-62) A broader context is also given by Daer, Hoffman, and Goodman in their "Rhetorical Functions of Hashtag Forms Across Social Media Applications", where they identified and grouped hashtags based on their metacommunicative functions in the following categories: "Emphasizing, Iterating, Critiquing, Identifying, and Rallying". (2)

Daer et al. mention that "[a]s the form's popularity grows, its function has morphed beyond findability and toward metacommentary.

What started as an organizational feature of social media applications is now part of everyday language use.” (2) Looking at posts that are usually lower in the trending top, hashtags become more versatile, being used to signal additional information about the user or to add another layer to the message.

Hashtags and Irony and Sarcasm Conveyors

The hypothesis for this paper, which follows an observation of very specific posts, is that hashtags have switched from expressing metadata to expressing metameaning. The problem with setting up an analysis for this hypothesis is that these examples are usually amongst undiscovered posts, they are highly personalized, and only a few of them are universally used to this end. Examples here include “#ihatemylife” and “#whyamilikethis”, which usually follow a description of a character trait or an individual’s habit.

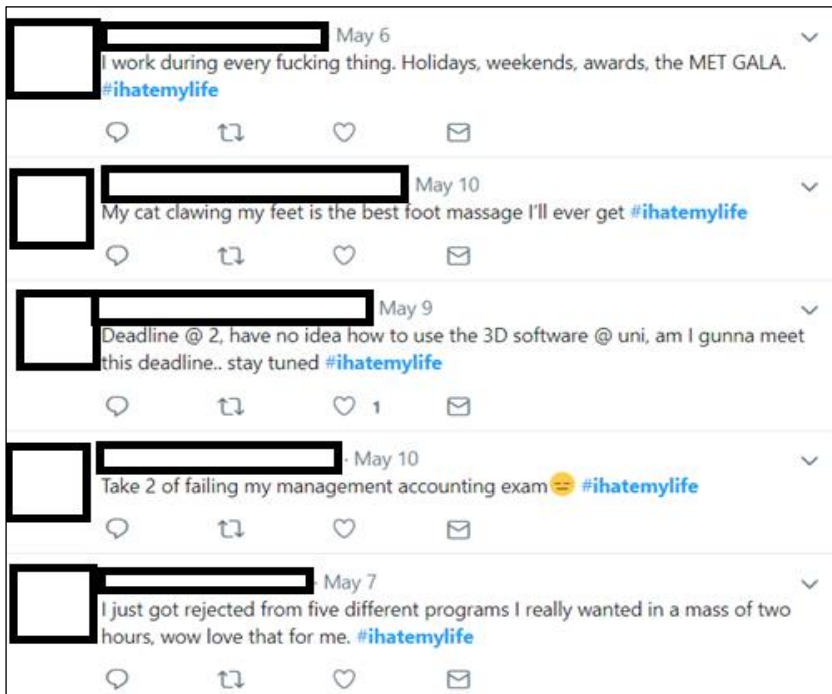


Fig. 3. Examples of the use of “#ihatemylife”



Fig. 4. Examples of the use of “#whyamilikethis”

These examples are self-derogatory commentaries, meant to trigger comedic responses or even comic relief. The medium for online communication is not congenial to paralinguistic manifestations, such as intonation, gestures, or facial expressions, which convey extra information about how the receiver of a message is supposed to process it. In exchange, written communication on online media needs extra tools/devices in order to let the reader know that one particular message is to be read as ironic or sarcastic, self-derogatory or otherwise.

An important point to mention is the contrast between the content of the post and the content of the hashtags. Even if used alone, it would be sufficient to determine whether or not the message is to be read ironically or neutrally. The “#ihatemylife” and “#whyamilikethis” examples are a statement and a question, respectively, that convey negative feelings about one’s personality or life, in addition to serving as supplements to the content of the message. Taken at face value, they have a negative impact and relay the message that the contents of the tweets are to be read as complaints or hard confessions. However, the presence of the pound sign “#” pre-heading the ‘sentences’ (written as per hashtags’ rule of no empty space) apparently modifies the messages, telling the reader that they are to be decoded as sarcastic comments, as instances of comedic relief at one’s own expense.

Other examples, however, show a direct, rather than oblique, discrepancy between the content of the message and the content of the hashtag.



Fig. 5. "yay" as contrast marker

The message in figure 5 is clearly not joyous, but lamenting. The addition of the "#yay", which normally is interpreted as a joyous exclamation, seems to be incongruent with the message. However, the addition of the "#" sign is equivalent to a muted tone, perhaps combined (in one's mind) with a straight face or eye rolling movement. These are all elements that are missing from computer-mediated communication, and seem to be aptly supplemented by hashtags, as the preferred, text-based paralinguistic item.

Conclusions

Although the aim of the present paper was an analysis of hashtags, there are a number of challenges such a research faces. One that has already been mentioned is related to creating the corpus for the analysis. While many people publicly express themselves on social media, a considerable number of people also share their posts with their private circle of friends. Privacy settings and concerns need to be respected, and as such, data is likely to be incomplete. Additionally, the database is continuously updated, as people share and post more and more messages every day, and oftentimes, the way in which they use language changes rapidly, especially ever since meme culture has become prevalent. Finally, the ethical challenge is related to how we can use these messages as part of a research study, as proper protocols have not yet been put in place. A more ambitious study concerning the power of hashtags to convey irony and sarcasm could be carried out using specific algorithms for discovering hashtags that could belong in a coherent corpus, and a sentiment analysis software that could be perfected for reading the hashtag as a cue for interpretation. However, that is beyond the

capabilities of this researcher and this paper, at the moment of writing. It is, still, an idea that is feasible for future research.

As for the conclusions of this paper, the hashtag appears to have evolved to serve as a cue for sarcastic or ironic interpretation of the message that precedes it, mostly through contrastive semantics. As noticed from the research papers and reviews read, as well as from personal experience, it seems that although capable of competing with emojis and GIFs in terms of possibility of expressing paralinguistic cues, the hashtag lacks the visual basis and therefore loses popularity with the users. For economy purposes, it is expected that hashtags still hold and further develop as such a device, yet when possible, visual-based expressions of paralinguistic and metacommunicative cues are likely to be preferred as the complementary item of choice in CMC.

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Power and Solidarity – an Analysis of *YouTube* Comments

CIOACĂ MARINA

Abstract: Goffman's theory of *face*-work and *face*-threatening acts, together with Brown and Levinson's distinction between positive and negative *face*, have started to be applied to the computer-mediated communication as well. This research paper focuses on analyzing the way in which concepts such as "power" and "solidarity" get shaped in an online platform, namely *YouTube*. Its purpose is to show how *YouTube* comments mirror real social interactions, using language as a way to showcase social superiority or community membership.

Keywords: *face-work, face-threatening acts, power, solidarity, online communication.*

Power and Solidarity in online communication

In order to discuss power and solidarity in online communication we have to discuss Goffman's theory on *face* and *face*-work (1967). In his own words, *face* is "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (Goffman, 5). Thus, this idea of *face* has relevance only during social interactions. The term *face*-work, on the other hand, represents a set of actions that has the purpose of avoiding *face*-threatening acts. Although it sounds complicated and artificial, it is certainly not the case. Most of the times, we use these acts naturally in our social encounters: "the members of each social circle may be expected to have some knowledge

of face-work and some experience in its use. In our society, this kind of capacity is sometimes called tact, savoir-faire, diplomacy or social skill.” (Goffman, 13).

Goffman’s work later inspired two other scientists to enrich the topic of *face*. Thus, in 1987, Brown and Levinson talked about a distinction between negative face and positive face (Brown and Levinson, 2). Negative *face* is characterized by the need to be independent, to have autonomy, this being the POWER component of our personality, whereas positive *face* encapsulates the need to be a part of a group, the SOLIDARITY component. This dichotomy is also the basis of social media, it being split between the need to belong to a group of people with the same interests as you (chat groups, *Facebook* groups) and the need to stand out, to have as many followers as possible. *Instagram*, for example, is entirely built on the branch called power, and actually creates a virtual social hierarchy based on number of followers. Power, thus, indicates an asymmetrical relationship, while solidarity is based on social equality and similarity. Power depends on variables like sex, age, status. On the other hand, “solidarity is associated with reciprocal forms of address. Both speakers address each other by title, last name or first name.” (Al Abdeli, 38). When talking about social media, solidarity via naming and addressing is often shown by words like *bro*, *dude*, *fam*, etc.

Returning to the idea of face-threatening acts, which is discussed by Goffman and Brown and Levinson, one can threaten both the positive and the negative *faces*. For example, tagging on *Facebook* can be seen as a threat to the positive face: *What if I don’t like the picture?* There are, though, different types of *face*-threats and their weight depends on three variables: power, social distance, and rating of impositions. As the power and social distance increase, so does the weight of the threat. In order to express this scale of *face*-threats, we present the following table elaborated by Thomas Holtgrave.

Table 1. Brown and Levinson's Superstrategy Continuum (Holtgrave, 145)

	Strategy	Defining feature	Example of request
Least threatening	Nonperformance of act		
	Off-record act	Intent is deniable	"It seems cold in here."
	Negative politeness	Indicates respect for hearer's autonomy	"Could you shut the door?"
	Positive politeness	Emphasizes solidarity	"How about shutting the door for us?"
Most threatening	Bald on-record act	No attention is given to the hearer's face.	"Shut the door."

On social media, negative and positive politeness is barely encountered, having to deal mostly with bald on-record acts or off-record acts. Even if the rules of politeness are almost completely changed in the online medium, the power spectrum based on age and social status is preserved: for example, when a teacher comments on a student's Facebook picture, the student shall use negative politeness, showing respect. In opposition, while in the real world one would be extremely careful about *face*-threatening a stranger, on social media, strangers communicate with each other with ease, perceiving them as part of a community, and thus allowing themselves to use a potentially more threatening discourse.

Social media is also based on the concept of self-disclosure. It refers to the communication of intimate details about oneself to others. This is quite a dangerous *face*-threatening act, it being a threat for both participants in the act of communication. Holtgrave adds that this disclosure doesn't happen spontaneously, but rather sustained by a context (149). Though this is not the case for social media – for example *insta*-stories are the literal documentation of someone's life (or at least their social media life) or the description of someone's Facebook photo contains it all – from the place and time of the picture being taken to candid words about the event. Social media has thus become a place in which one can have as many identities as they want and whatever identity they want. The creation of an online persona can have multiple reasons, but one of them is, certainly, the idea of avoiding *face*-threatening acts – by imagining a power position or wanting to fulfill a

solidarity act (joining a group with the same interests, where the communication will be free of *face* threats).

A brief presentation of *YouTube*

Beginning with an 18-seconds long video entitled “Me at the zoo”, the wide-spread platform called *YouTube* shelters now thousands of creators whose sole purpose is that of uploading videos for their viewers. Launched in 2005, it built an entire world, where being a YouTuber pays your bills better than a lot of other jobs. From music videos to news from all over the world or even common people documenting their lives, *YouTube* encompasses content for any kind of viewer. One might start to wonder how this platform became so popular so fast. Well, “as told by Jamed Karim, the third co-founder [...], the success of the site is due to implementation of four key features – video recommendations via the ‘related videos’ list, an e-mail link to enable video sharing, comments (and other social networking functionality), and an embeddable video player (Gannes, 2006)” (Burgess & Green, 2). And it is one of these key features that will be discussed further on, namely the *Comments* section.

The *Comments* section

This section is the space where viewers can write down their thoughts, feelings, opinions, etc. This section made possible the existence of a now-called “community”, where people in different parts of the world can discuss their preferences or dislikes. One might argue that these sorts of communities can be considered “communities of practice”. This term was first used by Wegner and Lave in the context of learning and education: “a community of practice is a living context that can give newcomers access to competence and also can invite a personal experience of engagement by which to incorporate that competence into an identity of participation”.

(Wenger, 1998, p. 214)¹ Eckert and McConnell-Ginet took this concept and applied it to sociolinguistics, believing that different styles of speaking could be molded inside these communities. They stated that members of these communities “develop activities and ways of engaging in those activities, they develop common knowledge and beliefs, ways of relating to each other, ways of talking – in short, practices”. (57)

The way in which these comments are organized is also important. The comments that are at the top are those that have the most replies, and even though there are such options as “Thumbs up” and “Thumbs down”, these do not affect their position. Because of the amounts of comments that each video gets and because there is no “search” option, having the most replied to comment is your goal. This is where the “power” component steps in. If you want your comment to be highly replied to or liked, you have to choose your words wisely. This linguistic awareness integrates the concept of “solidarity”, because your comment has to follow a certain code or contain certain key words in order to be accepted by the community. For example, YouTuber Felix Kjellberg (Pewdiepie), who has one of the most subscribed to channel in the world, usually calls his viewers “bros” and uses the phrase “bro fist” on a regular basis. Thus, having one of these key words in your comment will guarantee you the acceptance of the community. Fig. 1, 2 and 3 show examples of viewers that feel a sense of belonging to the community due to the shared appreciation of the “brofist”.



Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.

¹ Quoted in Graven and Lerman, 186.



Fig. 3.

YouTubers vs Viewers

In the world of *YouTube*, the power position usually belongs to the content creators, the YouTubers. They bring their content to the world and are also able to avoid *face*-threats if they wish so. However, this is quite hard when you document your personal life or display your opinions and preferences. Content creators can also ban certain words from the comments section or even remove entire comments. Another advantage is what is now called “clickbait”. They can use their video’s title and/or description in order to attract viewers in general or even a specific type of viewer. But creators themselves have a solidarity component, forming a community of “YouTubers”. From common challenges to meetings and collaborations, they all have this need of belonging.

When speaking about the viewers, the power component can be attached to those who leave comments full of hatred for basically no reason but that of standing out, of being noticed. These so-called “haters” are common to all types of channels. Their main goal is that of being the odd one out, individualised. Their comments are meant to threaten the *faces* of both creators (Fig. 4) and the other viewers (Fig. 5). It can also be noticed that whenever the *face* of the creator is threatened, people avoid direct address. They use the third person singular instead of the second person. This could have two interpretations: either they feel like their comment might be too harsh addressing the creator him/herself or they create a sort of gossip session inside the community, spawning hatred towards varied content-related aspects.

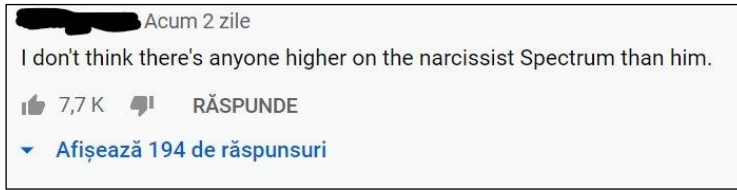


Fig. 4.

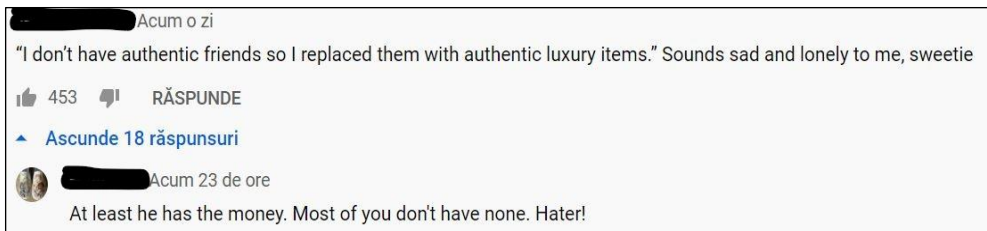


Fig. 5.

But the strongest component as regards viewers is that of solidarity. They identify themselves as a group; they share ideas, problems, encouragements, etc. One of the biggest movements of the viewers' community is, again, related to Pewdiepie's channel. His entire community acts in complete solidarity. The viewers directly address one another in the comments, like in Fig. 6, and they identify themselves as the "real bros" (Fig. 7). They even include the creator himself in this community, using the pronoun "we", breaking the power barriers set by the YouTuber-viewer differences (Fig. 8). This use of "we" as a binder stands in complete opposition to what we have discussed earlier about avoiding using "you" in the negative comments.



Fig. 6.

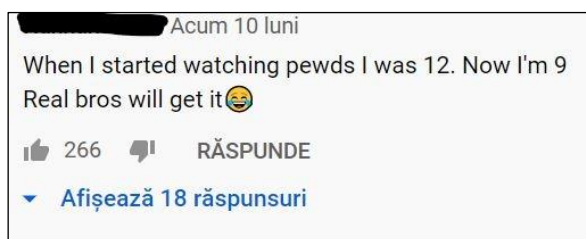


Fig. 7.

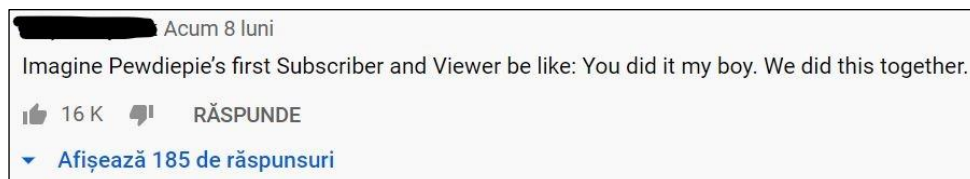


Fig. 8.

The same barriers are also broken by instances in which the creator participates in the *Comments* section. Fig. 9 is an example of a creator who showed solidarity to the people that commented on his video, building an idea of social equality, putting on a *Positive face*. This intrusion of the content creator also makes for more real communication, an actual dialogue. One might notice in this example that viewers aren't afraid of using the direct "you" in positive comments.

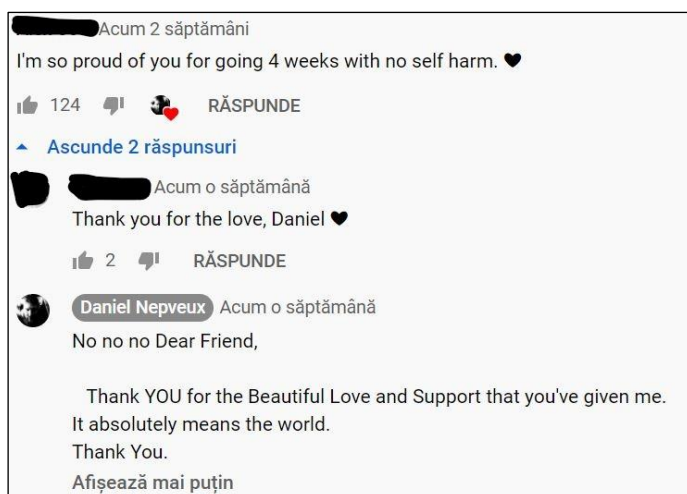


Fig. 9.

At first, viewers try to communicate with the creator, seeking understanding and appreciation. But the more they stick around, the more they turn towards the other members of the fanbase community. They might start considering them friends, clicking on certain videos because they know that they will find someone to talk to. In Fig. 10, we can see an example of viewers showing solidarity to one another, directly speaking to those in the *Comments* section rather than to the individual YouTuber. This switch needn't be considered negative. It does not mean that they have stopped caring for the creator, it means that s/he has done a good job of building an environment where people feel safe enough to create connections.

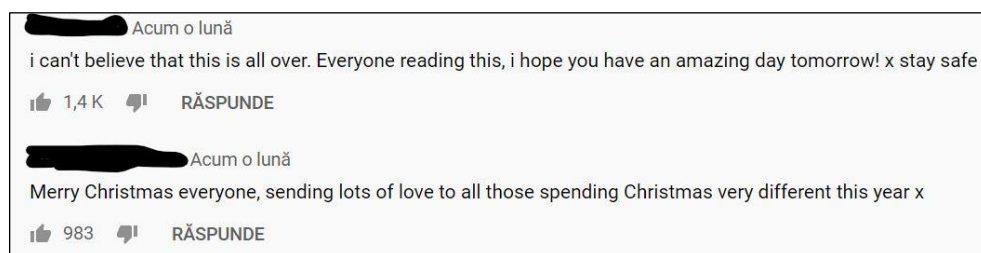


Fig. 10.

Conclusions

In conclusion, what made us want to analyze this platform socio-linguistically is its similitude to the real world. Having the same construct built on a switch between power and solidarity, *YouTube* allows its users to find a community in which they feel at home. But as with every other community, this is not free of power-seeking individuals. As we have seen, their choice of words shapes the way in which the community is built and it can also level up the power hierarchy whenever content creators appear in the *Comments* section. After analyzing some of the comments on the listed videos, we can state that the concept of solidarity is the one highlighted more and the one that weighs more linguistically.

Lately, *YouTube* has realized that the freedom of the initial platform has started to affect the real world, thus they have been trying to change the

rules of the game a bit. Content creators committing suicide because of hate comments or viewers performing acts of terrors for the attention of the creator are only two examples of how *YouTube* became hyperreality. There are a couple of things that the platform has changed in order to avoid such events: creators can now ban certain words or phrases from their comments stream, thus minimizing the use of hate comments, creators can get demonetized if they use disturbing images or words, etc. This stands as proof of the need of a linguistic etiquette and of the importance of controlling *face-threatening* acts.

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YouTube sources

<https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=Yu5y0N6ZtQo>
https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=D8thCYx_ZjI
<https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=DYlesHOaPkY>

Language of Cancel Culture

MARTINA LONČEKOVÁ

Abstract. The aim of this work is to explore the phenomenon of Cancel Culture on social media by observing patterns of individual and group behaviour, reflected in the language used by Twitter users in particular. The linguistic choices made by online users help show how online communities come together in a common cause to bring attention to past behaviour of public figures, in this case social media influencers and celebrities, and demand accountability for their actions, resulting in a range of possible consequences.

Keywords: *immediacy, hypermediacy, identity and collective action, cancel culture.*

Introduction

The online world is a place in which people can become easily absorbed. The affordances of social media platforms allow users to actively participate in a range of activities. It also allows them to find a voice they may have lacked before. This can be both useful and dangerous, as users sometimes engage in online campaigns against a person whose actions are considered wrongful or immoral. This phenomenon is known as cancel culture. The aim of this work is to analyze the language used by social media users who partake in cancel culture and observe possible patterns in their linguistic choices. The language analysis strives to prove the hypothesis of this work which claims that mass cancelling on Twitter may to an extent contribute to a range of consequences for those getting cancelled. This work

begins with the theoretical part devoted to the discussion of related terminology (immediacy, hypermediacy, identity and collective actions), defining cancel culture (what it is, who engages in it and what are the consequences). The analytical part contains methodology, the use of language and the analysis of the selected tweets, followed by discussion of findings.

Defining Terminology

Cancel Culture is a phenomenon which took social media platforms by storm. To understand why it works so well in the online environment, it is essential to explain the terminology related to this issue. Firstly, one needs to take into consideration the affordances of the platform itself. It can be quite easy to become absorbed by the interface and features of the platform, factors which all contribute to the sense of immediacy. In connection to this, Bolter and Grusin (2000) argue that “[i]t is the immediacy of the medium which allows a response within seconds and thus allows virality” (22). The devices are portable and light weight, thus user’s access to social media is easier and allows the platform to seamlessly integrate into the user’s daily life. One can use features such as share location, Instagram live, video chatting, and many others, to produce and enjoy content instantly. Tweeting, for example, requires little effort, therefore it is extremely easy and fast to engage in online activities. Hypermediacy, on the other hand, includes the interactive features of a particular medium, such as likes and shares, messages and comments, pictures, and hyperlinks, in other words, software and hardware of a social media platform, features which make the user aware of the medium.

Identity is closely intertwined with online communities. Like in the offline world, users strive to present themselves in a certain way and engage in collective actions in order to assert their membership to a particular group. One way of construing identity is microblogging, which is defined by Zappavigna as “the act of posting short character-constrained messages to the internet”. (2014: 146) Typical examples include user profile descriptions highlighting the most important facts about one’s life, preferences, and

interests, and engaging in hash-tagging. Hash-tagging is a mass performance, as a large group of people from around the world takes part in the discussion at around the same time. The topic varies according to relevancy, interests, and tastes. One of the popular and often trending hashtags on Twitter is related to personal preferences such as food, movies, video games, and many others. For instance, a hashtag went viral recently which tasked Twitter users with picking their favorite candy bars. Thus, social media users can form a sense of a bond and a community among themselves based on their likes and dislikes. And as they can create bonds around shared beliefs, interests, and values, they may also come together in a common cause and engage in a collective action. An example of such common cause can be becoming resentful of someone's problematic behavior, a result of which is "calling out", or the boycotting of the problematic behavior. This is known as cancelling someone. (Luu, 2019)

Ng offers the following definition of this online phenomenon: "the withdrawal of any kind of support for those who are assessed to have said or done something unacceptable or highly problematic, generally from a perspective of social justice, especially sexism, homophobia, racism, and bullying". (2020: 623) In other words, those accused of such acts may be guilty of breaking social norms, or even when expressing unpopular opinions on politics, business, and even pop culture. The supporters who decide to boycott those deemed problematic may do so by refusing to watch their content (YouTube videos, Instagram and Twitter feed, and others), unfollowing their social media accounts, or by refusing to buy their merch. Everybody can become a subject to online cancellation. Be it ordinary people, celebrities, powerful figures, even brands and corporations, everybody has to think twice before sharing their life and thoughts online.

So, what is actually the process of online cancellation? Typically, it begins with a presentation of immoral behavior recorded and posted online in the form of videos or pictures, or when a series of old tweets from a person's social media account resurfaces. This is usually no coincidence, as people actively search through someone's social media feed, especially in the case of popular personalities and celebrities, in order to dig up some

scandalous or distasteful thoughts. These posts or actions are then discussed and evaluated by an online group through “the collective reasoning of culturally aligned online crowds”. (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013: 159) The bigger the severity of one’s actions, the higher the demand for cancellation. As Clark puts it: “[s]ocial media allows masses of everyday people to leverage networked collectivity and a sense of immediacy to demand accountability from a range of powerful figures”. (2020: 4) This means that normal, everyday people can use online platforms (such as Twitter) to express their opinions and dissatisfaction with one’s questionable behavior and essentially mobilize in a common cause in a way they would normally not be able to do so. In other words, social media gives them a platform they usually tend to be lacking. (Bouvier, 2020: 2) Thus, an online community is formed, the members of which possess certain norms, values, and attitudes in an opposition to those whose acts they strongly disagree with. These group actions are typically very passionate, as the users may express a whole range of emotions including dissatisfaction, anger, sadness, shock, disgust, and others, which are seen as an important part of online engagement (ibid). But fighting for morality is not the only reason why many engage in cancel culture. There are many users who decide to chime in the conversation for the sole purpose of getting attention in the form of likes, retweets, and comments. Their contribution is often humorous and sarcastic content, which may not help in solving the situation, but it brings the community together. Lastly, cancel culture is not geographically constrained, it can happen anytime and anywhere with connection to the internet, creating a virtual phenomenon with people from different corners of the world participating, either by producing or consuming the content.

What are, then, the consequences for those getting cancelled? They may vary according to the severity of actions and the involvement of the public. The most notable implications include the loss of social connections and friends, the loss of employment or business opportunities (brands refusing to provide them with brand deals), in case of content creators the loss of audience and, finally, the damage to reputation and income. The latter may be a result of fans, subscribers, and followers refusing to buy the merch

of the accused creator. (Álvarez, 2020: 5) Therefore, it may have a destructive impact on one's social, political, and financial life. (Basak, 2019: 1)

Language of Cancel Culture

The aim of this research was to analyze the language of cancel culture in connection to the related theory discussed above. The platform chosen for the analysis is Twitter, as this phenomenon has a strong presence there thanks to the platform's interface. Therefore, the corpus is a collection of tweets that take the form of images and texts, or a combination of both. The items were collected with the use of available tools, including hashtags, trending page and advanced search on Twitter. All items are produced by English-speaking users of different nationalities. The target group are influencers and celebrities accused of immoral behavior versus Twitter users responding to those accusations. This research focuses closely on two personalities, YouTuber and influencer Shane Dawson and talk show host Ellen DeGeneres. Both went through a major downfall in 2020, therefore the tweets selected for the analysis are from June to December 2020. Dawson faced backlash after a series of his old videos were brought to the attention of a larger public. He had a history of racist remarks, blackface, and inappropriate behavior with minors. The magnitude of his cancellation was significant as he had been previously considered as one of the unproblematic content creators in the online space. The case of DeGeneres involved accusations of mistreatment and toxic environment in the workplace. Additionally, people pointed at many instances when DeGeneres treated her famous guests in unpleasant ways and thus making them feel uncomfortable. Similar to Dawson's case, DeGeneres was also viewed by an overwhelming majority as a nice, kind, pleasant, and popular host, which made the accusations even more shocking.

The language used in tweets related to cancelling has several noticeable characteristics, namely:

- **Colourful and descriptive language** – profanity, adjectives ('f*ck him', 'disgusting').

- **Expressiveness** – capitalization, excessive punctuation ('Is he for real?!', 'WHAT??').
- **Hashtags** (#ShaneDawsonIsCancelled, #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo).
- **Mocking** – through memes and sarcasm ('hE iS sO qUiRkY').
- **Use of emojis** (sad emoji for sarcasm, vomiting emoji for disgust).

The staple of linguistic choices on Twitter is, of course, the hashtag. According to Luu (2019), "[i]t is a powerful element of online communication, adding nuance and meta-commentary to what was said". Thus, as Luu goes on to suggest, it "[r]eveals this decade's preoccupation with self, community, belonging, beliefs, and the language goes hand in hand with building these ties". As becomes clear, hashtags are a way to express our interests and beliefs and by doing so assert a membership to a particular online community. Basak et al (2019: 3-4) provide an overview of the language of tweets, which are used as basis for the analysis in this work (Table 1).

Table 1. Categorization of shaming tweets

Category	Example
ABUSIVE	The use of profanity
COMPARISON	Positive or a negative comparison
PASSING JUDGEMENT	Often starts with a verb and contains modal verbs
RELIGIOUS / ETHNIC	Religious or ethnic shaming
SARCASM / JOKE	Typically includes emojis and sudden change of sentiment
WHATABOUTERY	Pointing out earlier action using Wh- adverbs and past form of verbs

Analysis of selected tweets

The first category analyzed is profanity. This was one of the most noticeable and often reappearing characteristics throughout the study. Such tweets not only garnered attention as they were more easily noticeable, but they also portrayed how the users feel about the person. Profanity was often accompanied with excessive punctuation and capitalization, a combination that in a way replicates (or imitates) shouting. A majority of abusive tweets contained a catchy hashtag related to Shane Dawson.



Fig. 1. Profanity

The second category in question is comparison. As Dawson and DeGeneres faced serious accusations, the comparative tweets were predominantly negative. These tweets poked fun at the personalities by comparing them to people and even animated characters that resemble them in a humorous way. The users often take people who are already disliked by the public and by comparing them to Dawson and DeGeneres, they suggest that these two personalities are even worse. Moreover, some physical or inner characteristics of these people are taken and compared to another person with a similar characteristic, such as Ellen's short, blonde hair, which is often compared to singer Niall Horan. This is often done to provoke reaction in the community who can then bond over their shared dislike of a certain person.

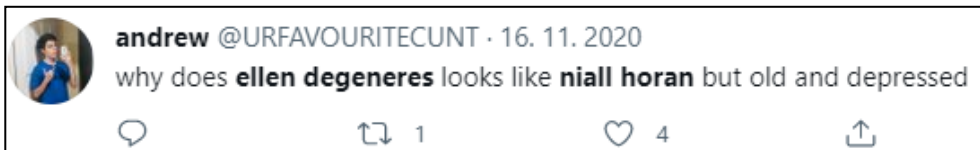


Fig. 2. Comparison

The third category is passing judgement. This collection of tweets contained a significant number of adjectives describing the two personalities and their actions in a negative manner (for example, 'A smarmy, fake, manipulative person'). Capitalized words and emojis were often part of the posts and described how users felt about the specific person. For example, in the context of the tweets, a 'vomiting emoji' portrayed aversion, and the capitalized word 'WOW' astonishment and disbelief in response to the allegations. In addition, most of the tweets also contained hashtags such as #ShaneDawsonIsOverParty, or #ShaneDawsonIsCancelled.

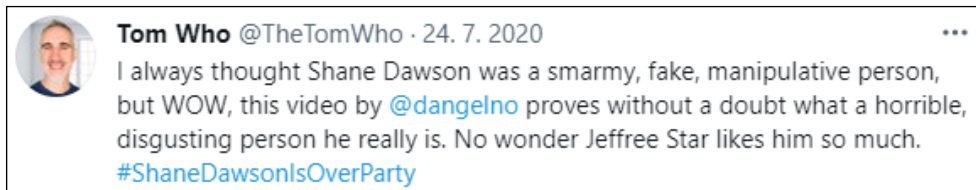


Fig. 3. Passing judgement

The fourth category of religious and ethnic nature was not observed in any of the tweets chosen for the analysis. One reason may be the fact that both mentioned targets of cancel culture are white, and thus are not subjected to racism, as their counterparts of different races and ethnicities possibly would be, if they appeared in a similar situation. Likewise, their religious (or non-religious) background was not attacked in any of the tweets.

The fifth category is sarcasm and jokes, which offers a combination of textual and visual components. There are two prevalent characteristics, the use of emojis and memes. Tweets conveying humor gain a lot of traction and attention, and the producers seemingly engage in a 'race' for the funniest commentary. The users often take a popular meme template that went viral and apply it to a situation at hand. For instance, one user took a phrase from a show called 'Curb your enthusiasm', which went viral for its hilarious scenes, and by wordplay created a new phrase specifically related to Dawson's case, 'Curb your racism'. Other users often employ emojis that are originally meant to convey positive thoughts and use them in a way to portray sarcasm and irony. Additionally, some users turn the words of those getting cancelled against them or mock their merch and those who still support them.

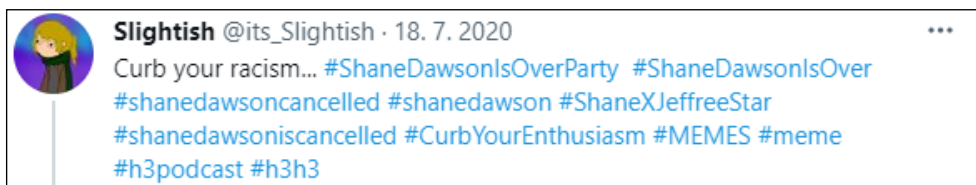


Fig. 4. Sarcasm and jokes

The sixth and last category is what Basak *et al* name *Whataboutery*. These tweets can be categorized according to the use of *wh-* questions, especially *why* and *how*, and past tense, and reflect on the past actions of these individuals. Many of them are part of long threads of tweets (including images and videos) offering an overview of all the person's wrongdoings. They tend to be more serious, but there are tweets which also employ memes. As the other categories, these tweets also contained the most used hashtags.

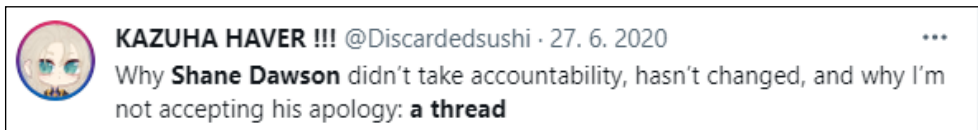


Fig. 5. Whataboutery

Discussion of findings

Several observations can be made about the language of cancel culture and the possible consequences. Firstly, cancel culture can, to an extent, contribute to a downfall of those getting cancelled. Last year in the summer of 2020, hundreds of thousands of people expressed their opinion on Shane Dawson, resulting in millions of tweets and views. The result of this was Dawson's withdrawal from the social media for almost a year. Dawson stopped sharing content with his fans on YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media, lost multiple lucrative deals with popular brands, and many fans turned on him and refused to support his merch. As of writing this work, he has expressed a wish to return to social media, however he is met with continuing anger and distrust. In case of DeGeneres, this beloved talk show host has struggled for months with a massive drop in viewership, until it was ultimately decided that her show 'The Ellen Show' will be cancelled after the last and final season. Both personalities thus faced severe consequences to their personal brands and lives.

Secondly, cancel culture can be directed and generalized. It may target a specific group but without a direct reference to a specific person, and directed, which targets a specific person, an organization or a brand. The implication for their actions can significantly vary, as individuals are easier to cancel than massive corporations. In Dawson's case, many tweets also indirectly called out the issue of racist and problematic content creators as a group, without directly referencing anybody. Ellen DeGeneres represents herself both as an individual and a massively popular brand, 'The Ellen Show', which makes her downfall that more interesting.

Thirdly, in relation to identity and group, there was a sense of 'us' versus 'them'. While the anger and other associated emotions were mainly aimed at the cancelled individuals, the users did not leave out those who continued to support these personalities. Those fans and supporters who excused their wrongful behavior were seen as part of the problem and often made fun of. On the other hand, those demonstrating against these figures seemingly bonded over a common cause – cancellation of an individual on the basis of their moral compass. To conclude, the beliefs, values, and interests of one group are contrasted with the other.

In relation to language, it was observed that strong feelings and emotions are indeed often accompanied with the use of excessive punctuation, capital letters, and profanity. This tends to mimic real-life talk, because it appears as if the user was raising their voice in an argument. Another way to convey one's feelings was through emojis, both in a serious and humorous manner. Memes were a frequently reappearing feature in the tweets. This showcases how popular they are among the online users at the present moment. It provides social media users with the possibility to display how they feel without the need to write a long accompanying text, and thus it creates a sense of immediacy. Hashtags were, unsurprisingly, a significant part of the language. They do not only alert the wider audience about the event as they see it on the trending page, but they also showcased a group identity being formed around the common purpose of cancelling someone.

Lastly, it is necessary to mention that we all have a responsibility for what we put out there and possibly face consequences for the actions, because the cyber community can be considered as a real community with its own social norms and rules. Cyber citizens are responsible for their own actions in the community. Like in real-world democracies, cyberspace also has consequences and punishments for those who are caught (such as getting reported on Facebook, Twitter, deletion of the account). (Shroff, 2011) Cancel culture is also an extremely dangerous phenomenon and a target of sharp criticism. While it can help to bring awareness to serious misconduct, it may create a somewhat toxic online environment, where everybody has to carefully watch their virtual footprint. While on one hand, every-day and marginalized people seem to gain a voice, some argue it actually contradicts the idea of free speech, as people, both ordinary and famous, censor themselves out of fear of getting cancelled. (Thomas, 2020) Moreover, it can be problematic to bring up someone's old tweets and posts from years ago, since people can change for the better, and their old behavior does not necessarily reflect their present self. Zurcher (2019) sums it up perfectly: "One of the warnings lobbed by those who rail against 'cancel culture' is that it will eventually know no boundaries. The living and the dead will all be subject to judgement by the contemporary standards of the day – standards that can change according to political whim."

Conclusions

Language is a powerful tool and can be used with good and malicious intentions. The language of cancel culture does not safely fall within either one of these categories. One group of social media users may want to simply bring attention to the dangerous behavior of other users online and thus bring about a change in the society, while others jump on the bandwagon to viciously attack somebody, or to attract attention to themselves by ridiculing them with memes. The language of cancel culture can be emotional and make the audience understand the severity of a

situation. It can also be humorous and mocking, without adding anything of value to the discourse. Regardless of where one stands, what these social media users have in common is a sense of community with similar beliefs and expectations – a desire to hold those getting cancelled accountable for their actions.

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Face-threatening Acts and Facebook Comments

PLOSCARU MIHAELA-ALINA

Abstract. The present paper analyses the way in which Facebook users post comments to a number of articles on the Facebook page *Bored Panda*. We will focus on the way in which these comments can be read in respect to the *face-threatening acts* proposed in the *Face and politeness* theory by Brown and Levinson (1987).

Keywords: *Facebook, comment, face threatening acts, politeness and face theory, computer-mediated communication.*

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to show that in online communication, *face-threatening acts* are just as used as they are in face-to-face interactions. However, we suggest that there are other factors that can be counted as face-threatening instances, and that these factors are specific to online communication. Moreover, some of them are particular to the social media platform Facebook only. Although Facebook is a platform where heated discussions can occur, we will try to show that online communication also fosters the rules of polite conversation, and that when people respond to topics which are not controversial, they do this using positive politeness strategies.

Theoretical background

The present paper has as its starting point the theory of *Face and politeness* developed by Brown and Levinson (1987). According to the two

authors' view, everyone, regardless of the culture he/she belongs to, follows a number of guidelines when talking to other people. The authors argue that these guidelines are universal and constitute an aspect that is specific to human interaction due to man's social nature. Moreover, even if they can take slightly different forms depending on the multitude of cultures around the world, their essence remains the same. A later paper by Brown (2015: 326) defines politeness as

essentially a matter of taking into account the feelings of others as to how they should be interactionally treated, including behaving in a manner that demonstrates appropriate concern for interactors' social status and their social relationship.

An important concept that the two authors borrow from Goffman (1955), and which they will later develop, is the concept of *face*, which they define as "the want to be unimpeded and the want to be approved of in certain respects". (Brown and Levinson: 57) Goffman is also the one who introduces the term *face work*, which he uses to characterize all actions "verbal and nonverbal" (Chen 2015: 819) that an individual takes in order to preserve both his/her face, and that of the interlocutor. Brown and Levinson will further develop this concept, and they will propose a generous number of *face-threatening acts* (FTAs) which are meant to characterize all these actions. FTAs are defined in respect to the two types of *face* (positive and negative) or, in other words, to an individual's "self-esteem". (Brown and Levinson 1987: 2) The negative face of an individual is defined as one's "freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61), whereas the positive face is directly linked to "the desire that one's self-image be appreciated and approved of". (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61) To put it differently, we can say that every participant in a verbal exchange will shape his or her sentences in such a way as to avoid any kind of conflict or potential aggression that could arise from that speech situation. Furthermore, as Brown and Levinson (1987: 59) argue, it is also in the mutual interest of the two parties to maintain each other's face, as by doing so they automatically maintain their own individual faces as well. Another important aspect that the two authors talk about is represented by sociological variables, which are those factors that always change in a social

interaction, and according to which the *face-threatening acts* will take one form or another. These factors are the following: *social distance (D)*, *relative power (P)*, and *the absolute ranking of imposition (R)*. An easy way to exemplify how these variables work, would be the following scenario: an employee will not talk to his manager in the same way he talks to his colleagues, nor will he act according to the underlying social rules of another culture.

However, the social variables tend to lose ground when we shift from what would be traditionally called face-to-face communication, to online communication. Chen (2015: 821) supports the idea that even if communication takes place in the social media, this does not necessarily mean that people will forget about the rules which underlie the traditional, daily conversation which takes place outside of the online environment. This also means that people do, indeed, expect the person they talk to to be polite, and to not violate the rules of polite conversation. However, as it is not only the case with face-to-face interactions, conflicts can also arise on social media, and people can find themselves threatening the positive or negative face of other users. According to Goffman (1967), when an individual gives face to another person, he/she acknowledges that person's standing in society, and such behaviour can be understood as a mark of respect to the other party, which will lead to maintaining a friendly and polite conversation, where no negative feelings should arise. As Brett (2007: 88) argues, when the two parties express positive emotions, even if there is a conflict between them, it is more likely for them to solve the conflict, than it would be in a situation where one of the participants, or even both of them, had strong negative feelings against each other. In her study, Chen investigated the behaviour of university students on social media, and after analysing the data, she came to the conclusion that FTAs on social media, just like the ones in real life, lead to attempts to restore one's public image, or what she calls "the social media face". (Chen 2015: 18) This should not surprise us especially because, unlike real life, where an individual is known by a limited number of people, on social media his/her profile can have a great number of subscribers, friends, or followers, which sometimes stops at the count of thousands. Moreover, people who have a very well defined and popular social media persona will try to defend it whenever possible, and

they might be more sensitive to face threatening acts. These social media platforms are a public space and many people have access to every post one creates. Thus, an FTA directed at only one person might offend other people's face as well, and in turn, they will feel the need not only to restore the threatened person's face, but their own face as well. This is possible because comments can also come in threads once a certain comment has more and more replies, and sometimes certain comments become more relevant than even the original post itself. Furthermore, on the internet, one person's face can be completely ignored, and *bold-on record* FTAs (those FTAs one does not try to hide) are more present than they are in real-life situations. Andersen claims that "polite expressions are only interpretable as such in relation to a speech situation" (2000: 17), however it might very well be that speech situations in the online milieu do not always unfold in the same manner that they do in real life, especially because of the option to ignore people on social media, or to delete their comments and posts so that no one can see them anymore. This option, however, is not present in real life conversations, and for this reason we argue that *bold-on record* FTAs are used more frequently than they would be used in real life situations.

Brown and Levinson (1987) also suggest that in real-life situations even positive FTAs can make the other party feel imposed on simply because such an FTA can draw attention to that person. This is not, however, something that social media operates on: a post on Facebook is like a shout out to one's virtual friends so that they see what a person wants to share. Online, drawing attentions is a goal, especially since most social media platforms have their own means of rewarding people for posting and sharing content. These means come in the form of *Likes*, comments, reactions (emojis: laughing face, smiling face, love, etc.), or subscribers. In Kerbrat-Orecchioni's terms, they act as *Face-flattering acts*¹, and Facebook reactions such as *Likes* would thus be "oriented towards positive reactions" (2010: 79). Thus, they help build up one's social media face or persona. This is especially important because on social media almost everyone has access to these posts, comments, and the activity that a person has had on that particular platform,

¹ For more details about FFAs, see Kerbrat-Orecchioni, Catherine. 2005. *Le discours en interaction*. Paris: Nathan.

while in real life people only know about certain aspects of someone's life, if that person should decide to share them personally.

Methodology

For this paper we have collected several Facebook comments that users posted on the public Facebook page *Bored Panda*. This page is a place where varied articles are posted on a daily basis, although they do not tackle political or economic topics. Most of these articles discuss posts that made a stand on social media, they are about pets, funny situations and light topics. We have randomly chosen four articles posted during May 2020, and selected comments that people posted in relation to the topics. As this page is a public one, we have not anonymized the name of the people who commented. The reason we have chosen this page has to do with the fact that the admins of *Bored Panda* do not engage in the discussions that take place in the comments section. Rather, it is only the subscribers who 'talk' through their comments, and sometimes long comments threads can occur, as people often start discussions based on the topic proposed in an article.

Analysis of findings

In the remainder of our paper, we will analyse a number of comments selected from the comments section of the page *Bored Panda*. Besides analysing their content, we will also focus on the number and types of reactions these comments receive, as we believe that reactions in the form of *Likes, Love, Care*, etc. can also be seen as FTAs, albeit from a virtual perspective.

The first post that we will discuss is the following:



Fig. 1.

Before we turn to the comments section, let us see what type of FTAs one can identify solely in the image above. The first one is represented by the number of times the post has been shared, which amounts to 228 times². Sharing a post on Facebook is a positive FTA which shows that people like the post, are interested in its content, and that they want their friends to see it as well. Moreover, sharing is a way of promoting a person (or a page in our case) as the more people see and like a post by *Bored Panda*, the more subscribers the page is likely to gain. The type and number of reactions that the post receives are also important. As we can see, more than 2,000 people reacted in some way to the post about the pair of rusty-spotted cats. Moreover, these reactions were positive ones overall. As Facebook only shows the icons for the three reactions that were used the most, we can safely assume that negative reactions like *Sad*, *Angry*, or even the ironic *Laugh* were not that many. The last type of FTAs we will talk about has to do with the comments which people wrote in response to the post. Their number is much lower even than the number of shares. However, this may be motivated by the fact that writing a comment takes more time than clicking the *Like* button. Moreover, not every Facebook user engages in writing comments, and many people do not react in any way to posts, even if they did subscribe to a certain page.

Let us now look at the first comment, and the replies it received.



Fig. 2.

² The numbers presented in this article might have changed since the data have been collected.

The first person to comment starts with a question about the breed of the cats. However, the first reply that Juliana receives takes the form of a negative FTA, which is also a *bold-on record* one. Antje S-Dot does not answer Juliana's question, and chooses to stress the fact that the latter's understanding of the post's content was wrong. This negative FTA can also be read as aggressive since it has three exclamation marks after each sentence. As none of the sentences expresses commands, orders, or greetings, it follows that the exclamation marks are what Brown and Levinson (1987) refer to as contextualization cues, although here they are used at the level of punctuation. This is probably done to express a raised intonation which could not be transmitted by writing alone. The second reply comes from A. Paige Kruger who, in a positive FTA, takes the time to explain the confusion between breed and species, and he also offers Juliana more details about the rusty-spotted cats. His comment answers Juliana's question, and it also uses a friendly emoji as a hedge. Moreover, his comment gains three reactions, and one of them is from Juliana. From this short comment thread we can see that, just like in real-life situations, the person who answered a comment in a polite manner, and used face threatening acts that were directed to Juliana's positive face, received more positive reactions from the people who stopped and read it than it was the case with the first comment. Thus, A. Paige's reply was more appreciated than that of Antje S-Dot's, which received no reactions, and no replies either.

The second post is about a clothing company at the way in which it chose to advertise their clothing.

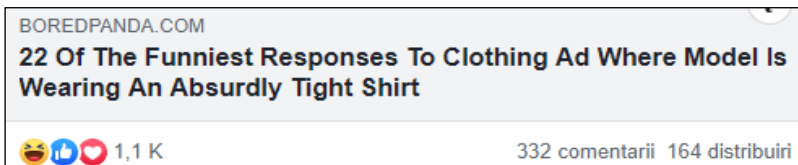


Fig. 3.

We can see from the start that this post gained less shares than the first one we presented, and the number of reactions is reduced by almost a

thousand, although they are similar. However, *Laugh* was the most used reaction for this post, showing us that a great number of people were entertained by the responses *Bored Panda* chose to include in their article. In terms of comments, we can see that this post gained more than 300 of them, and this might be linked to the controversial nature of the content, i.e. funny responses to the way in which a company chose to dress its male model. Now let us turn to some of these comments and examine the way in which face-threatening acts are embedded.

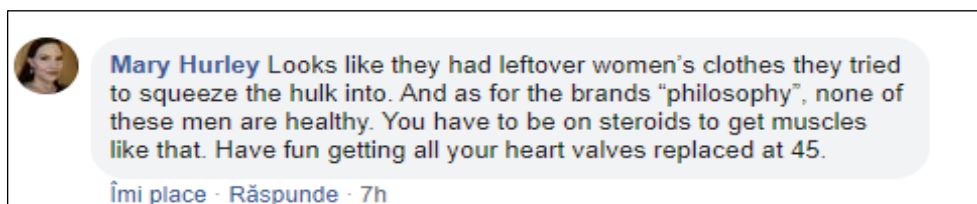


Fig. 4.

One of the comments comes from Mary Hurley, and it is a *bold-on record* negative FTA, in which she criticizes the choice the company made when they decided to dress their model in tight clothes. This comment is at the same time a negative FTA directed towards the model himself, whom she refers to using the word *hulk*. The last sentence which closes her comment takes the form of an *off-record* negative FTA, i.e. an FTA which has a sarcastic undertone. However, her comment does not receive any reactions, replies, or other types of FTAs, be they negative or positive.

Although many of the comments that this post received are similar to the one we discussed above, in the sense that they are a critique of the way the clothing company portrays the ideal of male beauty, there is one comment which does not address this problem at all, nor does it say anything impolite about the model's physique. This comment comes from Shannon Odom.

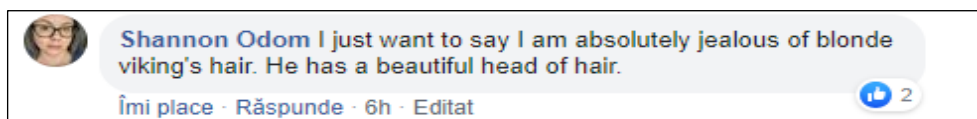


Fig. 5.

Shannon's comment is a direct positive FTA towards the model's physical appearance and his blonde hair. Her comment is also the only one which does not question whether his muscles are due to steroids, nor does it imply anything about the size of the clothes. Although the two likes she receives are less than what other comments gained, it is important to notice that this comment gained two positive reactions, as opposed to Mary Hurley's comment which was characterized by negative FTAs and which did not receive any type of reaction, although many of the other comments were in the same vein. Moreover, the comment can be read as a negative FTA directed at Shannon's own positive face, as she acknowledges that her hair is not as beautiful as that of the model's.

The last post shows a series of pictures that two friends with different body types took while wearing the same outfits.



Fig. 6.

This post has over 800 shares, and more than 1,000 comments. In terms of reactions, they are mostly made up of *Likes*, *Love* and *Laughs*. All these positive FTAs are mirrored in the comments, as most of the comments praise the outfits the two women chose in order to show how the same garment can flatter more than one body shape. Moreover, out of the two, the girl who has more generous curves is the one which is more often mentioned in the comments, just as in the case below.

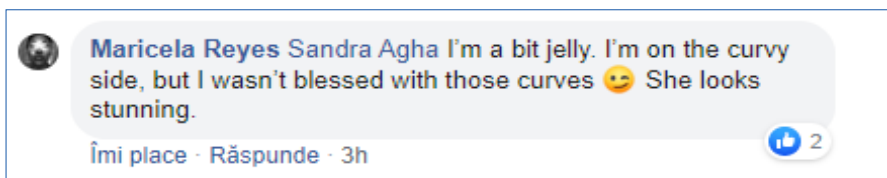


Fig. 7.

Maricela's comment is a clear example of a positive FTA directed towards Denise Mercedes, a real-life model, and the curvier of the two girls. She also uses an emoji as a contextualization cue, and her comment is liked by two other people. At the same time, this comment can be seen as a negative FTA which is directed towards Maricela's own positive face, as it states that although she has curves as well, hers are not as beautiful as Denise's are.

The second comment which we will analyse has gained 16 replies, although we will only exemplify one of them.



Fig. 8.

Courtney Burns's comment is the one which gains 261 positive reactions. Besides sharing her own experience with weight gain, she compliments the two girls and the way they look in the pictures they shared online. She also uses three exclamation marks and a heart emoji as hedges to express the feelings she had when seeing the pictures. Most of the other comments gained positive reactions from other people as well, reactions which act as positive FTAs both towards the person who posted the comment, to the Facebook page, and also to the two girls' pictures which were the starting point of the article.

Conclusions

From the analysis of the comments above it is clear that face threatening acts are just as an important part of online conversation on Facebook as they are in daily conversation. The way in which people react to certain posts is reflected in the reactions that the page allows them to choose from, and also in the comments section where discussions can start in threads. The majority of the examples that we found were characterized by comments where positive FTAs were used. These comments either praised the people the articles were written about, or they were replies to other people's comments. For most of the times, comments were not characterized by harsh critique, although there was an exception, i.e. the post about the male model who wore a tight shirt. In that post's comment section, most of the people directed negative FTAs towards the positive face of the model and the company. However, these negative FTAs were at the same time positive FTAs with respect to the Facebook page. Furthermore, this post also gained, overall, less reactions than the other, which supports our claim that polite conversation is preferred on social media just like it is in real-life situations.

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Trolling on Social Media

MĂDĂLINA ANDREEA POP

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to understand how trolling functions on the Internet. Thus, the study presents the profile of a troll and the characteristics of trolling from the psychological perspective of the impact it creates on social media. This helps understand the language of trolling on the Internet, where I showed the language differences between trolls and non-trolls. To demonstrate the differences the corpus was collected from three social media platforms: YouTube, TikTok and Reddit and the trolling events, the linguistic patterns trolling displays and the differences between the language of trolling on the aforementioned digital platforms are all explained.

Keywords: *trolling, social media, linguistics, Internet.*

Trolling

Through the Internet, many new linguistic phenomena arise to the surface that are not possible in conversations that take place face-to-face because the Internet enables anonymity, it gives more freedom to people to act differently. Such a phenomenon is trolling, which is defined by Gabriele de Seta as “*a placeholder for a stunning variety of practices, ranging from mocking or taunting each other for fun to disrupting large online communities, and from engaging in large-scale harassment campaigns to impersonating multiple identities engaging in extremist activities*”. (Gabriele de Seta, 2018: 392) Trolling refers to deception, trolls may pretend to be part of a group or community in order to harm the individuals or create discomfort within, with clearly negative

intentions, even though there are trolls who believe that their jokes are harmless.

In order to better understand how trolling functions on Internet, Michael Nycyk made an analogy between the phenomenon of trolling on the Internet and the trolls of the Scandinavian and Norse folklore. The troll of folklore lives under a bridge and its sole purpose is to stop the travellers, causing them distress by interrupting their journeys, whereas, on the Internet, which would be represented by the bridge, the troll is the person behind a screen that interrupts the journey of the Internet users. (Nycyk, 2017, 2) According to the definition in the Urban Dictionary, through trolling, people do not only seek to insult others or to make negative or rude comments, but want to disrupt the other users by deceiving them, making them believe their statements or their “malicious instructions”.

In *Rapid Evidence Assessment: The Prevalence and Impact of Online Trolling* we are presented with the profile of a troll and the characteristics of trolling. Those are important to clarify since they can help one with a better understanding of the purposes of trolling and why it happens in the first place. Thus, in many psychological studies traits, such as narcissism, psychopathy, Machiavellianism and everyday sadism form the Dark Tetrad. Those personality traits are associated with trolls because they do exhibit those types of behaviours. They show an excessive interest in their own persona, they do not have empathy, and it is very easy for them to deceive or manipulate others. (Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services LLP, 13) In addition, the characteristics of trolling are deception, aggression, disruption and success. This means that the trolls behave differently on online platforms than in their real lives. Hence, they present malicious behaviour seeking to counterattack other people or simply to annoy them, they try to disrupt conversations and to bring other people’s attention towards them, and finally, they seek a response from their victim, usually charged with negative emotions. (Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services LLP, 7) Therefore, trolls do not act like this because they want revenge or because they are upset with a specific subject, they do not have motives, they simply want to disrupt other Internet users out of boredom, malice or the need to feel powerful. This can be observed in the answer of a Reddit user when asked why he trolled:

*"Honestly, the simple answer is: its *** fun. The complicated answer is: why? That is difficult, even for me, to explain. It's like throwing the ball for a dog, but palming it instead of actually throwing it. Why do some of us do this? To some it is funny, others it is a power trip, even more do it just because they can. I will admit I think I am a mixture of all three."* (Reddit: Trolls of reddit, why do you do it?)

The language of trolls

A study was conducted in the paper *Linguistic Cues to Deception: Identifying Political Trolls on Social Media* to see if trolls use deceptive language, using a two-tailed test to identify the differences between trolls and non-trolls on Twitter. Some of the differences observed were that trolls have fewer followers, but more tweets than non-trolls. Trolls prefer to use more hashtags and links because in this way they can spread rumours faster and increase their credibility, persuasive power. As well, trolls use fewer discourse markers and causation words since those can increase specificity and the chance of self-contradiction. Given the probability of them being discovered as trolls, they also prefer to use fewer complex words and sentences in other tenses than the present tense, as this is the tense of non-persuasive conversations. However, trolls use more modality than non-trolls, which could be to make themselves more believable. Another feature that the study discovered was the non-immediacy, which means that trolls try to use fewer structures that could refer to themselves and other people. (Addaood, 2019: 9-21)

The act of trolling was named "*a trolling event*", which is defined by Luis Gerardo Mojica as a "*comment in a conversation whose intention is to cause conflict, trouble; be malicious, purposely seek or disseminate false information or advice; give a dishonest impression to deceive; offend, insult, cause harm, humiliation or aggravation.*" (2017: 1) The author gives the following example as a trolling event:

A.: What do you mean look up? :(I don't see anything lol

B.: Look up! Space is cool! :)

A.: why must you troll me :(

C.: Keep going, no matter how many times you say it, he will keep asking

A. probably asked genuinely for information, but user B. ignored his request and instead gave an inappropriate response, which caused a trolling event. B. was deceiving A., which caused negative emotions to A., as indicated by the use of the sad emoji. B.'s intentions were not to be helpful, but to cease his boredom. (Mojica, 2017: 3)

Flaming is another type of comment that trolls make to incite people. According to Michael Nycyk, flames are the comments that are aggressive and hurtful, and target groups rather than individuals. They can be encountered only on networked devices. (2017, 51-52)

Research methodology and hypothesis

In order to understand the phenomenon of trolling, I decided to collect data from social media, since trolling happens on computer-mediated platforms due to the anonymity people can enjoy there. It is much easier to troll someone if they do not know the troll's identity. This means I have scrutinised varied platforms, specifically YouTube, TikTok and Reddit, looking for comments that constitute a trolling event. I chose these platforms because the users do not need to give their real identities, they are not even required to have a profile picture, whereas on other platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, people's real identities are commonly on display. Thus, I concluded that the platforms of my choice have a higher likelihood of trolling events happening.

YouTube and TikTok are online video-sharing platforms, where people can upload and share different videos. People can communicate with each other through the comments to a specific video. The communication on this platform is not instantaneous, people can take minutes, days or even years to answer if they choose to do so. This means that trolls have more time to create their plan for deceiving other people and also to increase their probability of success as compared to a spontaneous conversation, where it is much easier for trolls to make errors and thus, have their plans exposed. The trolls in the comments can also create trolling events directly to the creator of the post, even though the possibility of the creator answering their

comments is lower. The two platforms also have the option of live streaming, with the content creators engaging directly with their viewers, and the latter using the live chat function to speak to the content creators, thus making the communication more spontaneous. Reddit is a discussion website, where people can write posts about different subjects regarding their subreddit, which is a forum with a specific topic, and having people reply to their posts in the comment section. Users on Reddit can upvote and downvote posts and comments. The most popular comments will appear first in the comment section. It is important to mention that many subreddits have a set of rules against cyber-bullying, trolling and spam. However, those rules do not prevent trolls from making trolling comments, but once they are discovered, the number of downvotes increases drastically.

In order to further anonymise the authors of posts or comments in my case study, even though their usernames are not their real names, I have chosen to give only the initials of their usernames. My purpose for this presentation is to establish how trolling manifests on social media, from the type of language used, to the patterns generating impact on the other Internet users. I tried as well to find variation of the language of trolling across different social media platforms.

Corpus analysis

Before moving on to the corpus analysis, I want to mention that the comments that I extracted from social media are rendered exactly as they appeared when I collected them. The original bad spelling or the grammar mistakes of the post were deliberately left as such in order to preserve the authenticity of the trolling events and partially explain the reactions to them.

The first trolling event that I want to present is the following comment section from a YouTube video, where J. wanted to check the reactions of the people that appeared in the YouTube video by asking for the link where J. could watch it:

J.: Now I need a compilation of their reactions
G.: I gotchu <https://youtu.be/dQw4w9WgXcQ>

P.: @G. an ad saved me so I didnt hear it
K.: @G. fkin btch
N.: https://youtu.be/cuLKC6C_sU Actual reactions
T.: @N. tysm
A.: @G. okay you got me
K.D.: @G. shouldve known 🤡

As it can be observed, G. pretended to be helpful by giving J. a link to what J. expected to be a compilation of reactions, however, G. instead provided a link to the song Never Gonna Give You Up by Rickey Astley. This song has become a meme in the trolling world for the sending of a disguised link instead of the link required. The phenomenon got a name of its own: rickrolling (knowyourmeme.com). We can note that the other users' reactions are negative, they are upset probably because they wasted time by clicking the link and their expectations were not met. However, T. comes to the rescue by attaching the actual real link.

Disguised links are very common in trolling. They seem genuine and simple to create by just putting a link, with low chances of self-contradiction, so that trolls prefer using this type of trolling, named rickrolling.

Another trolling event can happen if trolls bring up sensitive topics, such as racism, political views, and religion. This is what happened in the comment section of a YouTube video, where the YouTuber talked about the social movement Black Lives Matter trying to raise awareness and complaining about people treating it like a joke.

S.: I'm glad that she takes shit like this seriously. A lot of other people would have actually gone along with the joke. This goes to show the contrast in maturity levels of Rea and chat

P.: Blm is a scam

I: @P. unnecessary and toxic for no reason, you specifically.

S.: @P. I know that a lot of people are kinda just yelling at you cuz what you just said isn't okay, but I'd like to understand why you feel this way. Why is it that you feel the need to say unnecessarily stupid garbage on the internet when it surrounds serious and important events?

M.: @P. it's a movement that helps black people while the rest of the world finds it acceptable to demean, kill, and hurt them. That being said how exactly is it a scam?

W.: @M. I'm not defending him but I'd like to know exactly how it helps black people as a whole when literally on their website it's their mission to abolish the American nuclear family, they are literally telling you in your face they don't want father figures in black boys lives and how exactly does it help if the own movement is killing the people its "supporting" just in my city 6 black men were murdered during the protest by their own and I'm pretty sure...

S. expressed their gratefulness towards the YouTuber, however, P. made a very short controversial comment that ended up creating a ruckus in that specific comment section. With only four words, P. managed to bring many people to fight each other over this statement, resulting in over 80 replies, most of which were very lengthy attempts at coming up with their own arguments to make their case. It is interesting to notice that P. gives no reply to any of the comments in that section, not even to those addressed to him directly, like S.'s, who actually was keen to find out the reasoning behind P.'s words.

Thus, sometimes trolls do not need many words to incite people, they also do not need to continue replying to questions if the drama has already happened, creating the effect the troll wanted, bringing their trolling event to success.

This effect can also be created through questioning people in an aggravating manner. On a Reddit post, someone asked *Internet Trolls of Reddit: What's the biggest shitshow you've ever caused?*, and X. answered the following:

I made a reddit troll bot that did sentiment analysis on comments to find the most polar ones (very positive or very negative), then find the most polar sentence in that comment and quote it, then reply with a random negative response like:

You'd think so, but no.

Really? That's stupid as hell.

Are you f***ing serious? Really?

Studies prove otherwise.

If someone replied back, it'd keep going and reply back. I got a couple people on the hook arguing and then saying sh*t like "You're not even making sense!" after a few replies.

This person did not need to use sensitive topics to create controversies, but instead, X. chose the most popular or hated comments and questioned them, trying to dispute the claims the other person was making even though those claims were correct. By responding with those types of questions, the trolls can incite feelings of frustration from the other person who keeps trying to argue and prove their reasonings. However, since this is a trolling event, the non-trolls do not have a chance in winning this argument, the trolls do not want to be convinced, only to create negative sentiments, in this case mostly frustration. For example, when a troll says *"Studies prove otherwise"*, even if this statement is false, the non-trolls will start to question their beliefs, they will not be sure of their own arguments, creating even self-doubt.

Another example of trolling that happened on Reddit is the following case, where someone wanted to know the other people's experiences with the Pfizer vaccine for Covid-19. This subject of the pandemic is a sensitive one, and even the vaccines against Covid-10 still bring controversies. Thus, when A. shared their experience, T. asked A. a not so sensible question *"You still alive mate?"*:

A.: Got my first vaccine yesterday.

Immediately-1hr nothing, felt normal, no arm soreness

1hr-6hrs slight headache (although I think it was because I needed to eat) and tired. Arm started to get sore at about hour 2-3.

6 hrs-24 hrs arm still sore, nothing else to report.

Edit: I did have a small rash around the injection site for days 2-4 . Slightly itchy but nothing bad.

T.: You still alive mate?

A.: Yes... why wouldn't I be? I said I had basically no reaction. We don't need trolls here

T.: Chill I was kidding.

A.: Ok but people are legitimate freaked out about the vaccine. Saying sh*t like that is unnecessary.

Even though the question seems at first glance to point to the fact that T. is worried about A. by also adding the word *"mate"*, giving a sense of companionship, this question is not a sensible one, because there are people who believe that the vaccines are dangerous. By asking such a question on a

social platform this belief can become even stronger, which is why A. is upset by the question.

One final example that I want to present is a comment on a TikTok video, in which there is a girl swimming with a school of fish following her. The people in the comments were trying to figure it out how she did it:

A.: how?!they love you sweet so cute 😊

C.: im thinking she has food or something in her hands

S.: yeah...her hands are closed. Clearly holding food.

C.: @S. you seem to have a bit of an attitude over an innocent comment... today going all right for you? 😊

S.: @C. lol... whaaaaat? How did you possibly slant my comment to have any negativity whatsoever?

Woooooow. A bit twisted, no? 🤔

S. simply agreed with C., however, C. took S's comment and *transformed* it into a negative response, even though that was not the case. C. merely wanted to receive a shocked and a negative reaction from S., which is why C. no longer answered S.'s comment. By adding the structure "*a bit twisted*", S. realized that C. was trolling him and throwing the comment back to C., since what C. said applies exactly to C.'s comment.

Through all those examples that I extracted, I have the following findings, which I will also compare with the study from the article *Linguistic Cues to Deception: Identifying Political Trolls on Social Media* that I presented in the beginning:

1. Most of the comments have good grammar and spelling. This is important to make the trolling comments more persuasive. When people use good grammar, they also seem more knowledgeable and thus people are more likely to believe them.
2. Trolls use many questions to incite sensitive topics. Trolls resort to questions because they can create debates and incite arguments without even having to think up a story and try to make it believable.
3. Trolls do not use too often modality words, they prefer simple statements without making their trolling obvious. The same holds true for causation and discourse markers.

4. Trolls prefer to bring up sensitive topics, like racism, political views, health and religion.

There is a major difference that I managed to find between the platforms: on YouTube, people rarely reply back, they just create controversy and let the other commenters fight with each other. On TikTok, they do reply and they do not stop replying until they know for sure that they annoyed the other person, or until the intended victim herself stops replying. On Reddit, however, the comments are visibly longer since it's a discussion website, and the trolls can create even more credible stories.

Trolling events have a strong impact on other Internet users. According to Bharati Pratyush in the article *Influence of Trolling on Social Media Participation: An Empirical Investigation*, trolling can create the following phenomena:

1. Intimidation due to the comments having an abusive and inflammatory language to create negative sentiments.
2. Polarization due to trolls wanting to polarize serious topics, such as religion or ideology.
3. Constraints through the trolls' false arguments, trolls are able to disrupt the discourse to stray away from the main topic and bringing the topic on what the troll desires. (Bharati Pratyush, 2018, 2)

Conclusions

Trolls have become a big part of the Internet culture. People expect trolls everywhere, which is the main reason why Reddit has prohibited the act of trolling on certain subreddits. However, through deceptive language, it is sometimes hard to realize which comments constitute trolling, especially in the case where trolls manage to create a dispute through only a couple of words, as we saw in the corpus analysis. Trolls can create harmless but annoying comments, pranks rather than anything else, however, there are trolls that are not afraid to hurt others through their trolling. As Michael Nycyk says "*People seem less concerned with privacy and anonymity openly abusing and disrupting others*". (Nycyk, 2017, 66) Thus, trolls can control the

flow of a topic, they use deceptive language and different strategies depending on the platforms they use.

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Exceedingly well-researched and interesting papers. The topics are lively and the arguments persuasive and logically stated. A thoroughly readable book addressed to all students and linguists whether or not trained, qualified or experienced in the particular field of Internet Linguistics.

Chira Dorin



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